

Sports Illustrated

FEBRUARY 2, 2015
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LEGION OF

BOOM

KAM CHANCELLOR

RICHARD SHERMAN
**HAS A FEW THINGS
ON HIS MIND**

P. 22

JEREMY LANE

EARL THOMAS

BYRON MAXWELL

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Utah

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The Hornets' forward has rebuilt both his shot and his voice **By Lee Jenkins**

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was Coach 1K

SI HAS REGIONAL
COVERS THIS WEEK:

TONY TRILO
FOR SPORTS
ILLUSTRATED
(BANKS); ROBERT
BECK/SPORTS
ILLUSTRATED
(SEAHAWKS)

2.2.15

2015 | VOLUME 122 | NO. 4

| LINEUP

IN REMEMBRANCE

52

Ernie Banks

Mr. Cub was the heart and soul of the Wrigley faithful. Losing with him wasn't fun, but losing without him would have been intolerable **By Rich Cohen**

+

FACE OF THE FRANCHISE

Banks, posing on May 9, 2001, spent 19 seasons as a Cub.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WALTER IOOSS JR.
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

SI NOW

WITH HOST
MAGGIE GRAY



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POWERED BY FORD



BARRY SANDERS The Hall of Fame running back, who ranks third on the NFL's alltime rushing list (15,269 yards), discusses the Deflategate controversy with SI Now host Maggie Gray

MAGGIE GRAY: Did the air pressure of the ball ever give you an advantage or disadvantage?

BARRY SANDERS: It wasn't something I ever really noticed that much. I do know some guys like a ball that is more worn or that's broken in, but that's about it.

MG: So softer balls or maybe a little bit more firm doesn't matter to you? It doesn't mean you can grab it from the

quarterback better?

BS: No, no. The newer balls tend to be more slippery with all of the oils and things like that, so I think that is why guys like to scuff them up a little bit. But that's about it.

MG: Do the players think this story is a big deal?

BS: It has to be a big distraction for the Patriots. And the Seahawks are probably sitting there laughing and are really amused

"The Seahawks are probably sitting there laughing."

—Barry Sanders

and enjoying the fact that the Patriots have to answer all of these questions about this. I think they probably see it as an advantage.

MG: Do you think it would be an advantage for you if you were playing?

BS: I think it would be. If the other team had to address these issues? Absolutely. I'm sure the folks in Seattle are doing their best to fan the flame as much as possible.

MG: You have a son who plays football as well, Barry J. Sanders for the Stanford Cardinal. Was there ever any apprehension about letting him play football?

BS: For me, I balance it by saying, there are risks. They're normal concerns. But there are so many benefits to team sports and organized sports that for us we made the decision that it's O.K. for our kids to play.

For more of Sanders's interview, plus the SI Now archive, go to SI.com/video

TUNE IN



EPISODE: JAN. 19

Peter King and Don Banks discuss the x-factors for Super Bowl XLIX



EPISODE: JAN. 20

How young is too young to play tackle football?



EPISODE: JAN. 21

2008 Olympic gymnastics champion Shawn Johnson on cheating in her sport



EPISODE: JAN. 21

Hall of Fame quarterback Dan Marino makes his Super Bowl predictions

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[^]1Symphony Health Solutions ProVoice™ Survey, Jan. 2005–Mar. 2014 ^{^^}Pharmacy Times Surveys, Acid Reducer/Heartburn Categories 2006–2014
^{**}P&G Calculation based on Nielsen ScanTrack FD+, 2004–2014

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**Leading
Off**

1K for Coach K

■ Mike Krzyzewski guided Duke to a 77-68 win over St. John's on Sunday at Madison Square Garden to become the first men's coach in Division I history to reach 1,000 victories (POINT AFTER, page 60). Coach K began his career in 1975-76 at Army, where he won 73 games over five seasons; the rest have come with the Blue Devils. After the game, (inset, from left) guards Matt Jones, Tyus Jones and Rasheed Sulaimon honored their coach.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
TIM CLAYTON
FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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1
of
3









+

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**Leading
Off**

Sink or Swim

■ Seton Hall guard Sterling Gibbs got encouragement at the free throw line from members of the Pirates' swimming and diving team during a Big East game against DePaul on Jan. 22 in Newark. The swimmers didn't help Gibbs's stroke, though: He made only 2 of 16 shots from the floor and 4 of 8 from the line. Seton Hall was outscored 17-5 down the stretch in a 64-60 defeat.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
VINNY CARCHIETTA
ZUMAPRESS.COM





+

33

**Leading
Off**

Pom-pom Pow!

■ Will Ferrell created a ruckus at halftime of the Pelicans-Lakers game on Jan. 21 by knocking out a member of the cheerleading team while attempting a half-court shot. The cheerleader was actually stuntwoman Taryn Terrell, and the gag was for a movie, *Daddy's Home*. New Orleans beat L.A. 96-80.

PHOTOGRAPH BY
DERICK E. HINGLE
USA TODAY SPORTS

INBOX

FOR JAN. 19, 2015



Many Giants fans endured the franchise's terrible records in the 1970s without resorting to becoming Cowboys fans. The reward has been four Super Bowl championships. Such lack of loyalty by New Jersey governor **Chris Christie** speaks volumes.

Jack Richard Vivona, Damascus, Md.

If You Do Not Want the Swimsuit Issue

The annual SI Swimsuit Issue will be published in February. If you're a subscriber and would prefer not to receive the issue, call our customer service center, toll free, at 1-866-228-1175. If you choose not to get the SI Swimsuit Issue, SI will extend your subscription.



The real answer to Oregon's loss lies in the lack of any green or yellow on its uniforms. The Ducks' only other loss this season was to Arizona on Oct. 2 when they wore pink, black and silver.

Elayne Golden, Venice, Fla.

Urban Meyer did one heck of a coaching job in beating Alabama and then walloping Oregon in the championship. However, he failed to show any type of sportsmanship by allowing the Buckeyes to score another touchdown when they were already up by 15 points with 30 seconds left against the Ducks.

Macy Brown, Madison, Ala.



COVER

Congratulations, Ohio State! For a while it seemed as if the playoff selection committee was determined to keep the Buckeyes out of the championship game. But in the end, look who was wearing the glass slipper.

Stephen A. Silver
San Francisco

PAGE
52



So Nick Young, the Lakers' second leading scorer, is shooting less than 40% and averaging just 14.1 points? No wonder L.A. is in the toilet.

Terry Griner
Spokane

PAGE
60



POINT AFTER
Steve Rushin's column looking back on champions of 2015 left out one: A thoroughbred appropriately named Unbelievable, who became the first Triple Crown winner since Affirmed in 1978.

Jack W. Walker
Aledo, Texas

CONTACT
SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

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Edited by / JIM GORANT / TED KEITH

+ Scorecard

Patriot Shames

Deflategate is more than just a Super nuisance. It's another black mark against a coach and a franchise whose legacy has been tarnished by scandal

BY TIM LAYDEN



A DECADE AGO

the Patriots won their third Super Bowl in four years, a sudden dominance engineered by a defensive mastermind who had failed miserably in his first head-coaching job and a 27-year-old quarterback who had languished until the sixth round of the 2000 NFL draft. New England was just the second franchise to win three titles in four

years (after the 1992–95 Cowboys) and seemed poised to challenge the Steelers and the 49ers as the only teams to win four Super Bowls in one decade. The Pats were the model that every organization in the NFL was emulating.

The Patriots couldn't have known then that they would spend the next 10 years chasing that fourth Lombardi Trophy. And they most definitely

could not have known that their quest would include controversies both genuine and surreal, making New England known as much for breaking rules as for breaking records. Now the Pats are in the Super Bowl again, and again there is controversy, this time in the form of a bizarre scandal called Deflategate.

What was remarkable this time was the sight of

head coach Bill Belichick, in an extraordinary press conference last Saturday, fighting for either 1) his and his franchise's reputation or 2) some type of psychological edge in which suddenly the burden of proof is shifted back to the NFL and beleaguered commissioner Roger Goodell, while New England is free to prepare for the Super Bowl.

For a long time the

Patriots didn't seem to care about controversies. It all started with Spygate in 2007, when they were found to have videotaped Jets coaches' signaling plays from the sideline. Belichick was fined \$500,000, and New England was docked \$250,000 plus a first-round draft choice. And even then, in a statement issued through the team, Belichick diminished the impact of the taping: "We have never used sideline video to obtain a competitive advantage while the game was in progress." He was seen by many fans as ducking full responsibility or, worse, being dismissive of the league's ruling.

The bad taste lingered, and some attached an asterisk to the Patriots' three Super Bowl victories. All of this was prelude to last week's scandal, over whether the Patriots purposely deflated footballs before their 45-7 victory over the Colts in the AFC championship game (which, even if proved, probably did not affect the outcome). Last Thursday, Belichick and Brady spoke at press conferences six hours apart, disavowing any knowledge of football deflation. Instead of shutting down the controversy, they elevated it to new heights of intrigue.

And make no mistake here: The ball-deflation controversy is major news primarily because the Patriots are involved and because it happened

in the playoffs. Even as the contretemps was unfolding in Foxborough, the Browns, who went 7-9, were being investigated by the NFL for violating rules regarding the use of electronic messaging on the sideline during games. This received virtually no publicity, because it's the Browns.

There are larger issues. It's possible the NFL has singled out the Patriots for scrutiny regarding football deflation and who knows what else because Belichick is imperious and grouchy and has cheated previously. It's also possible that a large swath of the football-crazed public wonders how many times the Patriots have bent the rules and not been caught.

So here stood Belichick last weekend at the same lectern where two days earlier he had denied any prior knowledge of deflated footballs. The coach, who commonly—but not always—works tirelessly to say nothing, talked endlessly about air pressure and the preparation of footballs. About Deflategate, Belichick said, "We try to do everything right. We err on the side of caution. It's been that way for many years now."

Eight days before the Super Bowl, he sounded like a man who was trying to reshape his legacy. Or a coach trying to kill a distraction in order to win the Super Bowl. The second will be easier than the first. □

+

GO FIGURE

7' 7"

Height of a bobblehead doll honoring former NBA player **Manute Bol**, who died in 2010. The doll is to be displayed at Oracle Arena before the Bulls face the Warriors on Jan. 27. The 7' 7" Bol played three of his 10 seasons for Golden State.



\$7M TO \$10M

AMOUNT THE CAVS' **KYRIE IRVING** COULD HAVE MADE, BASED ON INCENTIVE CLAUSES IN HIS CONTRACT, IF HE HAD BEEN ELECTED AN ALL-STAR GAME STARTER. HE FINISHED FOURTH AMONG GUARDS IN FAN VOTING.



\$4,000

Annual apparel allowance from Adidas for new Michigan football coach **Jim Harbaugh**, who recently signed a seven-year contract worth a minimum of \$40.1 million.

29

Goals in Sunday's NHL All-Star Game, the most in the event's history. Team Toews beat Team Foligno (the squads are named for their captains, who draft players for each side) 17-12. The previous record of 26 was set in 2001.



BALL GAMES

As the Deflategate spins on, laying waste to Super Bowl week, it's instructive to remember that football isn't the only sport in which shenanigans with the ball—pulled off by players, coaches or governing bodies—have caused problems.

Bad Luck

GOLF



→ At the 1996 Greater Hartford Open, Greg Norman was tied for fourth while playing a Maxfli XS 90. But the ball was mismarked, reading XS 9 instead. Unfortunately for Norman, there was no XS 9 on the USGA's list of conforming equipment, so the Shark was disqualified. At least Norman is not alone. Jeff Sluman was booted from the 2004 Buick Classic for playing a ball with no model markings, and Paul Azinger was bounced from the '09 Travelers for teeing up a mismarked ball.

NBA



→ For the 2006-07 season the NBA replaced its traditional leather ball with one made from a synthetic microfiber. Players hated it, complaining that it was slippery and hard to palm and that it felt weird. Some even started getting small cuts on their fingers from the ball, and at one point Suns guard Steve Nash played with bandaged hands. The league brought back the original ball on Jan. 1, 2007.

SOCCER



→ For the 2010 World Cup, Adidas designed a ball called the Jabulani, which was made from eight thermally bonded panels with very shallow seams. Players complained that the ball flew unpredictably, and later lab testing proved that at lower speeds it created aerodynamic anomalies similar to that of a knuckleball. During the tournament Nigeria's Yakubu Aiyegbeni missed a wide-open net from 10 feet and Ghana's Asamoah Gyan missed a penalty kick that many blamed on the ball.

TENNIS



→ At the 2013 Madrid Open, Anabel Medina Garrigues of Spain was playing top-seeded powerhouse Serena Williams in the quarterfinals. During the match Medina Garrigues was seen on camera scuffing new balls against her racket to make them fuzzier, which would slow them down and negate Williams's advantage. Because the umpire didn't see what was happening, Medina Garrigues went unpenalized. Williams won anyway, 6-3, 0-6, 7-5.

MLB



→ The latest known episode in baseball's long history of spit balls and scuffers came from Yankees righty Michael Pineda, who was caught putting pine tar on the ball during the second inning of a game against the Red Sox on April 23, 2014. The sticky substance allows pitchers to get a better grip and therefore put more spin on the ball. The Yanks lost 5-1, and Pineda was suspended for 10 games.

Belichick

THEY SAID IT



"This is what happens when I pass too much!"

KOBE BRYANT

Lakers guard, tweeting that his team-leading 5.6 assists per game led to his torn right rotator cuff.

EXTRA MUSTARD



Food Bowl

→ **SUPER BOWL WEEK** brings out the fascinating and banal. This year's game is in Glendale, Ariz., but nearby Scottsdale seems to be the place for the offbeat, including a try at the record for world's fastest skateboarding dog, an athletes-and-animals fashion show and a cigar party with Mike Ditka and Ron Jaworski. The topper may be the 27-foot-long, 25-foot-wide replica of University of Phoenix Stadium made up of 40,000 snack foods. Phoenix's Bar Napkin Productions spent 1,200 hours designing and building the edible edifice at Scottsdale Fashion Square, where it will stand until Feb. 1, when the \$150,000 worth of groceries will go to the St. Vincent De Paul food bank.



>40,000 food items

SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE

Terry Hendrix, a Colorado inmate, has **sued the NFL for \$88,987,654,321.88** over Dez Bryant's overturned catch against the Packers on Jan. 11.



BREAKOUT PERFORMER

HOT

Klay Thompson

The Warriors guard scored an NBA-record 37 points in one quarter. Team considers changing its name to Molten State.

Shea Weber

The Predators D-man had the hardest shot at 108.5 mph, earning respect in the NHL—and the NRA.

Cristiano Ronaldo

Red-carded at Cordoba for kicking and slapping. At least it didn't escalate to hair-pulling.

Marshawn Lynch

The Seahawks will now be penalized for his crotch-grab celebration, aka the icky shuffle.

Robert Allenby

Shocking. His tale of robbery and abduction has a few holes. Hint: Next time say a cameraman backed into you.

NOT





TRIBUTE

Final Lap

■ In 1993 most figured that Jeff Gordon, the brash, inexperienced California pretty boy with the Rainbow Warrior handle, would be run out of NASCAR, the Southern-fried sport then ruled by the King (Richard Petty) and the Intimidator (Dale Earnhardt Sr.). But it took 92 victories, four series titles and a 2014 season in which he finished a dominating sixth in the Chase before Gordon, 43, slowed down. Last Thursday he announced that this season, his 23rd, would be his last racing a full-time Sprint Cup schedule. Gordon will still compete on occasion (Off-road? Endurance?) and become more involved with Hendrick Motorsports, the team for which he has raced his entire career and in which he holds a stake. A career in broadcasting seems likely too. Wherever he goes, his legacy as the driver who single-handedly towed NASCAR into the modern age will follow.

— Andrew Lawrence



Luke Kennard | *Franklin, Ohio* | *Basketball*

Luke, a 6' 6" senior shooting guard at Franklin High, sank 34 foul shots to set a state record in a 77-75 win over Montrose Christian High at the Flyin' to the Hoop Invitational in Kettering. In December he broke the scoring mark at the Beach Ball Classic in Myrtle Beach, S.C., with 52 points in a 96-73 defeat of Mullins [S.C.] High. Luke will play at Duke.



Alecia Farina | *Broadview Heights, Ohio* | *Gymnastics*

Alecia, a junior at Brecksville High, scored a 10 on the vault at the Rock 'N' Roll Classic to become the first gymnast in Ohio high school history to earn a perfect score in any event. She also won the other three events to take the all-around crown with 38.7 points, leading the Bees to the team title. A two-time defending state champ, Alecia will compete at Maryland.



Patricio Lugo III | *Homestead, Fla.* | *Wrestling*

Patricio, a South Dade High senior, beat defending 145-pound 1A state champ Adam Breindel of Clay High for the 152-pound title at the Troy Smith Duals in Kissimmee for his 100th straight victory (since extended to 108 matches). During that stretch, he has not given up a single takedown. Patricio won the 138-pound Class 3A state title last year.

Faces in the Crowd

→ | Edited By ALEXANDRA FENWICK



Sariyah Jones | *Modesto, Calif.* | *Wrestling*

Sariyah, a junior at Enochs High, defeated Mira Monte High's Angelica Llanes 3-0 for the 108-pound title at the Napa Valley Classic, the biggest girls' event in the state. Last July, Sariyah was seventh at the cadet freestyle world championships in Snina, Slovakia. Ranked No. 1 in the U.S. in her age and weight class, she was 22-0 at week's end with 19 pins.



Anthony Perkins | *Lenexa, Kans.* | *Tennis*

Perkins, 34, the director of adult tennis at Midtown Athletic Club in Overland Park, went undefeated in winning the men's 35-to-40 age group title at the Wilson/Mayfair Senior ITF Tour in Toronto. He beat Canada's Giovanni Schiavo 6-2, 6-4 in the final. Perkins, who has multiple sclerosis, is ranked 214th in the world in his age group.



Jackie Bleifus | *Stewartville, Minn.* | *Volleyball*

Jackie, a 5' 8" senior setter at Stewartville High, had 46 assists in a 3-2 victory over three-time defending champion Marshall High, helping the Tigers win the Class 2A title. Her last assist, which clinched the victory, set a school single-season record of 800 and gave her 1,000 for her career. Jackie was named to the state all-tournament team.

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Just My Type

→ Interview by **DAN PATRICK**

DAN PATRICK: *How tough is it to divvy up minutes?*

JOHN CALIPARI: It's not about keeping guys happy. It's about getting them better. It's about them being accountable enough—that if you play, you must perform. We had dinner the other day, and I asked, “How many of you want to give up your minutes?” None of them raised their hands.

DP: *Can you have too much talent?*

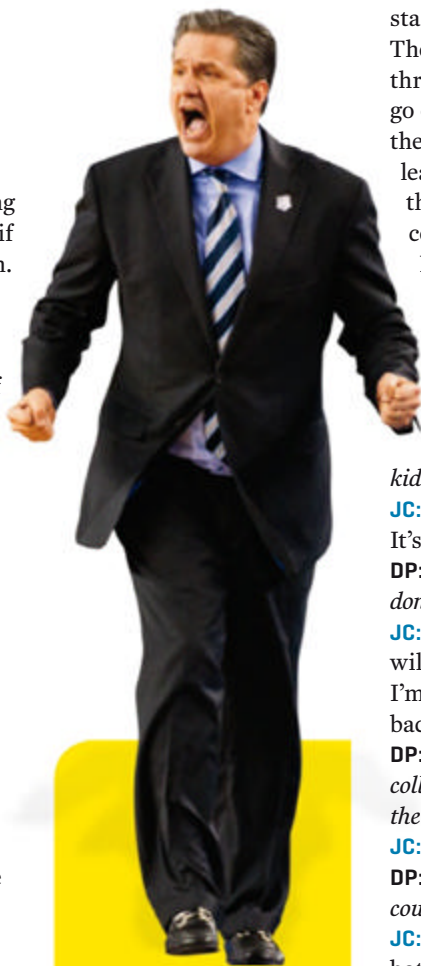
JC: No, absolutely not. You can have talent with kids who don't have heart, and then it becomes difficult. The only reason this is working is the players allow it to work.

DP: *Do you learn more from other basketball coaches or coaches from other sports?*

JC: Both. When I was [setting up my platoon] I called [NFL coaches] Mike Tomlin, Marvin Lewis, Joe Gibbs and Bill Parcells. I [asked], “How do you have different units and make sure they're still a team?” They all came up with the same kind of stuff: You gotta be prepared to play seven, eight guys and let them know it will be decided on the field.

DP: *How does someone like 7-foot Willie Cauley-Stein, who could have gone pro last year, feel on this team?*

JC: He's doing fine. He has



JOHN CALIPARI

DIVIDE TO CONQUER

The Kentucky coach has split the minutes among his blue-chip players: None are averaging more than 26 a game. The platoon system is working. Through Sunday the top-ranked Wildcats were 19–0.

done some great things defensively and rebounding. These kids all trust each other. They trust our staff. They look at results.

The kids that have come through here not only go on to the league, but they also play well in the league. A guy put down the 31 players that I've coached who are in the NBA. Their total salaries came to \$820 million.

If you threw in John Wall's or Derrick Rose's shoe contract, you're at \$1 billion.

DP: *Save it for the kids in their living rooms.*

JC: I speak the truth.

It's not spin.

DP: *You've taken the one-and-done system and made it work.*

JC: Four kids on this team will graduate. It's just that I'm not going to hold kids back. It's their choice.

DP: *You were a player in college. Could you make the Kentucky roster?*

JC: No. Neither could you.

DP: *You think you could outshoot me?*

JC: I got you, and I had both hips replaced.

DP: *I'd make you one-and-done with me. I'd shoot in front of your team, like when Larry Bird was lighting up the Hawks.*

JC: They'd be laughing because of Dunlap. Your belly done lapped over your belt.

DP: *I'm in good shape.*

JC: You've got a six-pack, but it's not the one near your waist. □

Guest Shots Say What?



Hawks forward **Al Horford** explained

why GM Danny Ferry's leave of absence over racist remarks hasn't affected the team. “We have a group of veteran guys who didn't want to get caught up in things we couldn't control,” Horford said. “We weren't going to let that mess up our season.” ... Former



Patriots QB **Drew Bledsoe**

shared a story of malformed footballs involving kickers Matt Bahr and Adam Vinatieri: “They put the balls in the dryer, then started playing cards and forgot about them. They ruined an entire batch. They looked like rugby balls.” ... NFL Network draft guru **Mike Mayock**



weighed in on Oregon QB Marcus Mariota:

“Because he plays in that spread system, everybody is scared to death of what's going to happen when you ask him to play from an NFL-style pocket. It's a pure projection because you can't see it on the field.”



Lexi Thompson
Age 5

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The Case for . . . Being Awesome

BY JOE SHEEHAN



LAST WEEK the

Nationals signed the top free agent on the market, righthanded starter Max Scherzer, to a seven-year, \$210 million contract. The deal, which features \$105 million in deferred money—an MLB record—validates Scherzer's decision to choose free agency over the \$144 million the Tigers offered him during the 2013–14 season.

For the Nationals the signing may seem like an exercise in lily-gilding. Already projected as the top team in baseball, Washington now has six above-average starting pitchers to go with a strong everyday lineup that features young studs such as third baseman Anthony Rendon and leftfielder Bryce Harper. Before Scherzer had even signed his deal, there was speculation that the team would follow up by trading one of its now extraneous starters, impending free agent Jordan Zimmermann or former top pick Stephen Strasburg, to bolster its future and pare the payroll. But Nationals GM Mike Rizzo shot that idea down, telling MLB.com, "We love the team we have." He should stick to that.

The Nationals have a chance to provide something that hasn't been seen in years: a great baseball team to follow all summer. Regular-season greatness is out of fashion these days, with the expanded



postseason lowering the bar for entry and division titles reduced to what they are in the NBA, NFL and NHL: little more than a means to a better playoff seeding. The new model for MLB teams? Be just good enough to squeak into the postseason, then see what happens in October. Last season, neither Series team won 90 games, but fans of the Giants (88 wins) and the Royals (89 wins) wouldn't trade their years for those of the Angels (98 wins), Orioles (96 wins) or Nationals (96 wins).

Moreover, 2014 was the third consecutive season in which no team won 100 games, the first time that's happened across three full seasons since both

leagues went to a 162-game schedule in 1962. There have been only three 100-win teams in the last nine years: the '08 Angels, the '09 Yankees and the '11 Phillies. Only one of those teams won even a single playoff series. The modern game encourages teams to roll the dice on an 85-win team. It's economical, but it makes for dull summers waiting for the only real intrigue of the season, a surge by one of the .540 teams to capture the fifth playoff spot or the warmed-over chase for home field advantage in the Division Series.

The Nationals can take a stand for greatness. Put Scherzer, Zimmermann, Strasburg, Gio Gonzalez and Doug Fister on the mound, make 15-game winner Tanner Roark a reliever again and try to be the story of the summer. It's been too long since baseball had a team that made fans wake up every day and ask, "Did they win?" Since the 2001 Mariners won 116 games, only the '04 Cardinals have won 105. The Nationals can challenge that, simply by putting their current team on the field: the best baseball team we've seen in a decade.

It's not as if being a great regular-season team will hurt them in the postseason, either. The '08 Angels and the '11 Phillies may have flamed out in October, but those '09 Yankees, who went 103–59 after a huge off-season shopping spree, won the World Series without facing an elimination game. They were by far the best team in baseball from April through September, and then they were the best team in baseball in October. That's what the Nationals can shoot for. □

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EXCLUSIVE

SUPER BOWL

XLIX

PREVIEW

BOOMSDAY

BY RICHARD SHERMAN

+
Photograph by
Robert Beck
Sports Illustrated

LEGION AIR

Sherman quite literally wouldn't be here without his D-back brethren: He was adamant that all 10 members of the Seahawks' secondary be in the picture. Standing, from left: Byron Maxwell, Kam Chancellor, Steven Terrell, Jeremy Lane, Tharold Simon, Richard Sherman, DeShawn Shead, Marcus Burley. Seated: Earl Thomas, Jeron Johnson



Player discipline, comparisons with the '85 Bears, the trouble with Roger Goodell. . . . As the Seahawks line up for another run at the Lombardi Trophy, and on the same week that the commissioner gives his annual pre-Super Bowl address, the leader of the NFL's most fearsome secondary offers his own take on the state of the game





LAST SEASON, while I was posing for magazine covers and calling out wide receivers in unconventional ways, I was also negotiating for an extension on my rookie contract. Seahawks general manager John Schneider asked me an important question: “Who are you going to be when you get paid?” As a fan, you’ve seen the scenario play out dozens of times—*Player X gets a megadeal and never lives up to the paycheck; he stops playing hard and starts making business decisions with his body*. I told John that I’m not playing football for the money, that I want to be the best to ever play. I said, “I’ll be the guy who has \$50 million in the bank and plays like he has \$5.”

My coach, Pete Carroll, says I’ve grown up since that breakout year, and to an extent, I agree. You see the world a little bit differently at 26 versus 25. Little slights don’t affect me as much as they did a year ago, and I don’t get overjoyed like I used to. It takes a little bit more to move the needle—winning a Super Bowl will do that. When you join a group of men and accomplish something so difficult and so rare, you no longer feel as though you have to prove things to people who haven’t proven anything to you. In most cases I have a better résumé than my detractors.

Before I had that, I was lucky to be drafted by Pete and John, who assembled around me one of the most talented and diverse defensive backfields in football. More than I want individual success, I want to be remembered as part of the Legion of Boom, which is why all of us are on the cover of this magazine. In football, unlike various other sports, it takes a total team effort to be successful.

I can’t perform at this level without Kam Chancellor, the lion of the Legion, the guy who once picked off Peyton Manning by ducking to make it appear as though he couldn’t leap for the ball. He’s also the guy we go to with our problems, who doles out advice about a lot of issues that arise outside of football.

I can’t perform at this level without Earl Thomas—The Example—who can show you how to do the right thing better than he can explain it. When everybody else is joking, he’s locked in, a reminder of what we’re here for.

I can’t perform at this level without Byron Maxwell, our chill guy, oblivious to the pressure. I remember him joking around with Carroll in our rookie camp, saying that if he was allowed to play nickel he’d choke out the slot receiver. Carroll relented and Maxwell delivered, only to get injured in camp. Now he’s the corner on the other side, and his consistently high level of play makes QBs’ decisions very difficult.

I can’t perform at this level without Jeremy Lane, the scrappy guy from Tyler, Texas. Competition brings out the dog in him; just look at what he’s done to the Packers’ Randall Cobb.

Carroll requires certain things of all of us—we have to tackle with the best—but he’s allowed each of us to be ourselves. This organization let me develop a public persona through trial and error, and it let me be non-

Some of the same people slamming Marshawn for not talking are just as likely to condemn a player for protesting police brutality.



chalant in my technique, something I wasn’t allowed to do at Stanford. I don’t imagine that’s an option in New England.

When you grow up in this defense, it becomes difficult to judge receivers across the league by watching them on tape. Most cornerbacks don’t push receivers to their limits with effective press technique; only a handful of cornerbacks outside Seattle are capable of it—guys like the Patriots’ Darrelle Revis and Brandon Browner. Those are the players who give us the best indication of which receivers will be a challenge for our team.

With us, what you see is what you get: Press man and Cover Three—though the league continues to undermine our style of play, making



The MMQB.com

Sherman's hardly the only talker in the Legion of Boom. For a roundtable interview with all five members, head online to TheMMQB.com, where the fivesome debates what other NFL D-backs might fit in amongst their ranks.

things easier for the offense. Pass interference is a spot foul when called on the defense, but it's a 10-yard penalty when called on the offense? We had the Packers facing third-and-13 in the NFC championship game, and the referees called hands to the face on one of our D-linemen who had no impact on the play. Five-yard penalty, first down. Those are the moments when you wonder, How can we win as a defense? People ask me how I'd compare this defense with the 1985 Bears, and I never have the answer they're looking for. But I know this: In this era, with the rules we play by, we're as dominant as any team can be.

But those are small issues. On a bigger level, I look at the NFL today and I'm as disappointed as ever in its management. Commissioner Roger Goodell operates at a high level, but he's doing what 32 owners tell him to do. I once believed that having more retired players in the league office could remedy this, but the player in the highest position, executive vice president of football operations Troy Vincent, continues to disappoint. When he told Adrian Peterson he'd receive a two-game suspension and the league failed to deliver, he became just another suit.

Under Goodell the league continues to put players like Marshawn Lynch in a position to be mocked by the media, which seems to get a kick out

VICIOUS CIRCLE

No secondary has allowed fewer completions, yards or TDs in the past two years than Seattle's, against whom opposing QBs have a league-low 71.7 passer rating in that time.

of seeing people struggle on camera. As teammates we're angry because we know what certain people do well and we know what they struggle with. Marshawn's talking to the press is the equivalent of putting a reporter on a football field and telling him to tackle Adrian Peterson.

Some of the same people slamming Marshawn for not talking are just as likely to condemn the Browns' Andrew Hawkins and Johnson Bademosi for protesting police brutality with T-shirts. They want to hear us speak, but only if we're saying something they want to hear. As athletes who spend most of our waking hours at the team facility, we learned about the events in Ferguson and the death of Eric Garner through a kind of osmosis—you see a video clip or read a story, but you never get the full picture. We understand, though, what it is to grow up as a black man in America. As a community, the best way for us to avoid becoming victims is for people to understand that we can avoid a great majority of these situations. Too often we look at a Ferguson and we say, That's what's wrong with my life, that's why I'm in the situation I'm in.

I thought long and hard about joining in with players across the league and making a visual statement—a T-shirt or a hands-up gesture—but ultimately I decided against it. I asked myself, What message am I sending out? Am I going to end police violence? Racism? No, of course not. So how can I evoke change?

I got some news nine months ago that helped me reach a conclusion. My girlfriend, Ashley, and I are expecting our first child, a boy, any day now. I've realized in the last year that I can evoke change by being a great role model: a man who respects women and police officers, who graduated from college and does everything in his power to be successful within the rules.

Circumstances dictate where you start—a single mother raised Kam Chancellor to become the man he is today—but each individual determines his course. Where I came from, in Compton, kids were brainwashed into thinking that if they weren't athletes or rappers or drug dealers they were nothing. My son will understand that he's in control of his own destiny and that education, work ethic and discipline will guide him to an even better life than I've enjoyed. He'll be the man who makes this world a better place through positive actions and influence.

□

EXTRA POINTS



THREE KEYS TO A SEAHAWKS WIN

1 Wilson's wheels.

Take out every run by a quarterback across the NFL, and Seattle's ground attack would have ranked fifth in the league, not first. Russell Wilson's 849 yards on the ground were fifth most alltime for a passer and 210 more than this season's No. 2 running QB, Colin Kaepernick. The tenser the moment, the more apt Wilson is to take off. Counting the postseason, 23.4% of his rushing production has come in the fourth quarter of one-score games or in overtime.

2 How go the combos?

Seattle runs an abundance of isolation routes, with receivers spreading apart and operating on their own islands. But when they go to what are known as combination routes—where two or more patterns work off one another—No. 1 receiver Doug Baldwin is almost always the focal point. It'll be interesting to see if they attempt these routes when Baldwin is guarded by Darrelle Revis, a brilliant combo defender. If Seattle does, it'll be with Baldwin in the slot, running a downfield pattern to the sideline.

3 The other Boomers.

Richard Sherman gets plenty of attention—he's the NFL's best boundary defender, with a keen sense for diagnosing pass designs outside the numbers and using the sideline to limit receivers' options. But he couldn't play so aggressively if not for Earl Thomas, perhaps the league's smartest safety. And opposite Sherman, the long-armed Byron Maxwell has become a prototypical Seahawks corner. You might even see Maxwell matched one-on-one outside against Rob Gronkowski a few times.



Best Supporting Factors

Six guys not named Sherman or Brady who could play equally important roles on Sunday

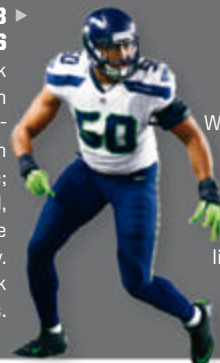
LUKE WILLSON, TE ▶

With Seattle's WRs likely to struggle against New England's CBs, an alternative pass catcher must rise up. Willson, a 2013 fifth-round pick, has gotten faster and smoother with increased playing time in the wake of Zach Miller's season-ending ankle injury.



K.J. WRIGHT, LB ▶ KAM CHANCELLOR, SS

Meet the primary Gronk defenders. While both have covered TEs man-to-man (Chancellor in one-high safety coverage; Wright in two-high), neither will do it alone very often on Sunday. They'll help double Gronk in zone concepts.



BOBBY WAGNER, LB ▶

This 2012 second-round pick has been the key to Seattle's No. 3 run D. Wagner has steady speed and an understanding of angles, particularly when pursuing to the perimeter. And like Seattle's other back-level defenders, he's sharp in coverage.





A MATCHUP OF TWO NO. 1 SEEDS HAS ODDSMAKERS STUMPED AND PUNDITS ON THE FENCE. HAWKS OR PATS? CONSIDER THREE ARGUMENTS FOR EACH TEAM. . . AND FOR SI'S PICK, TURN THE PAGE + **BY ANDY BENOIT**



THREE KEYS TO A PATRIOTS WIN

1 Ground power. New England ran 40 times for 177 yards in the AFC championship win over the Colts; 23 of those runs and 108 of those yards came behind a six-man line. That extra lineman, Cameron Fleming, is often used at the point of attack, usually accompanied by a guard pulling around from the other side. This effectively puts an extra 650 pounds of mass in front of 250-pound bull LeGarrette Blount, who has shown not just power but also surprisingly light feet since rejoining the Patriots in November.

2 Gronk power. Only two players were unanimous first-team All-Pro choices this season: J.J. Watt and Rob Gronkowski. An improving blocker, Gronk was used all over the formation in 2014, including out of the backfield in the running game. But he's most dangerous catching passes down the seams, which he often reaches from an interior tight end position, lined up inside No. 2 tight end Michael Hoomanawanui. Gronk can also operate as a wide receiver, though that will be difficult against the Seahawks' corners.

3 Hidden gem Devin McCourty. The safety can cover plenty of ground as a single-high centerfielder, where he smartly reads QBs and route combinations. Amplifying his value, he has also become a key man-to-man defender in New England's three-safety dime package, where he often takes the tight end. This should come as no surprise: His twin brother, Jason, is the Titans' best cornerback, and Devin himself entered the NFL as a first-round corner before changing positions in 2012.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: OTTO GREULE JR./GETTY IMAGES; CHRISTIAN PETERSEN/GETTY IMAGES; JIM ROGASH/GETTY IMAGES; DAVID E. KLUTHO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; JOE NICHOLSON/USA TODAY SPORTS; MARK J. REBILAS/USA TODAY SPORTS; TOM PENNINGTON/GETTY IMAGES



SHANE VEREEN, RB ▶

Few backs can line up outside and do damage like Vereen. But unless Seattle plays straight man-to-man (which it actually did in the second half of the NFC title game), Vereen's pass production will come from the slot or out of the backfield.



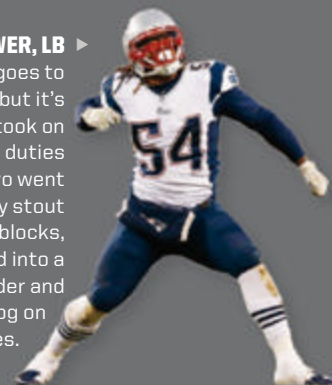
VINCE WILFORK, NT ▶

Not many 325-pounders play 70% of their team's snaps—especially coming off a torn Achilles. Wilfork, who joined the Pats the year they won their third Super Bowl, will give Pro Bowl center Max Unger trouble.



DONT'A HIGHTOWER, LB ▶

Much attention goes to ILB Jamie Collins, but it's Hightower who took on signal-calling duties after Jerod Mayo went down. Extremely stout when taking on blocks, he's blossomed into a superb run defender and an important cog on inside blitz packages.





Standing Pat

Our expert knows Russell Wilson can win a game by himself—it just won't be Super Bowl XLIX. Not against this New England D

by ANDY BENOIT

AT A JAN. 21 press conference, Seahawks cornerback Richard Sherman made a not-so-subtle allusion to Tom Brady's temper. "People sometimes get a skewed view of [him]," Sherman said. "That he's just a clean-cut [guy], does everything right, never says a bad word. And we know him to be otherwise."

What Sherman (and most of the league, really) also knows is that Brady loves to release the ball upon planting his back foot at the end of his drop. If he's not able to do that, teammates suffer the wrath that Sherman says lurks within number 12. When a blocker gets beat or a receiver falls off course, Brady, the micromanager of New England's option-route-intensive offense, is forced to move within the pocket. That's something he does quite well—but he still finds it far from ideal.

And that's why Super Bowl Sunday could

be a frustrating one for Brady. Inside, Seattle's nickel defensive front features Michael Bennett, who has the quickest lateral first step of any 3-technique in football. Outside, there's 2012 first-round pick Bruce Irvin, who offers an explosive mix of leverage and speed. Lining up opposite him, Cliff Avril is an even more fearsome threat. These men will face a Patriots O-line that's been up and down in pass protection this season.

Then there's that vaunted Seattle secondary. Cornerbacks Richard Sherman and Byron Maxwell can disrupt any receiver's timing outside. But the real battles will

be fought *inside*, where Patriots receiver Julian Edelman and tight end Rob Gronkowski will face a linebacking and safeties group that's sensational at recognizing routes and helping each other in zone coverage. Together, they'll force Brady to make plays outside of structure. The Patriots can't win this game strictly through the air as they did in the divisional round. It's imperative that they maintain balance from their rushing attack. Beating the Seahawks on the ground requires a willingness to stick with the run when it produces three- and four-yard gains. LeGarrette Blount

gives the Pats this drive-sustaining element.

When Seattle tries to do the same thing, it's Marshawn Lynch (not QB Russell Wilson, dynamic as he is) who makes the ground game go. He's unparalleled at gaining yards after contact, plus he has the lateral agility to create space behind a predominantly zone-blocking line—albeit one that may have trouble against a meaty, technically-sound New England front.

The read-option is Seattle's staple, especially later in the game if the score is close. Wilson's acuity here can make linebackers and



Under Pressure

All this debate about ball tinkering?
It's over-inflated, says SI's under-the-center expert



by **BOOMER ESIASON**

safeties tentative, helping the Seahawks' passing attack stay afloat. It's a passing attack that often lacks rhythm and asks its receivers to win one-on-one—something they're not cut out to do. Leading receiver Doug Baldwin's 825 yards ranked 42nd in the NFL.

What Seattle's aerial game lacks in rhythm, Wilson makes up for in unbelievable playmaking prowess. Plenty of passers have been adroit on the move, but none quite like Wilson, who's accurate throwing to anywhere and from any platform. While most QBs' movements outside the pocket are randomized, Wilson's are structured. It's an integral—even deliberate—part of Seattle's offense.

The Patriots are one of the few teams with a front seven capable of competing with that. Defensive end Rob Ninkovich is tremendous at setting the edge, and he rarely lets opponents break his containment on the outside. Linebacker Jamie Collins is a rare athletic specimen, particularly in space. He'd make an excellent QB spy in a matchup like this.

Wilson can't win this game all by himself—but with his receivers facing Darrelle Revis and New England's stingy man-oriented secondary, he'll often have to try. That's why, for the fourth time in his career, Brady will lean on shrewd game management and a sturdy defense to claim the Lombardi Trophy. **THE PICK: PATRIOTS 23, SEAHAWKS 17**

THE FIGHT OVER game balls has been going on for decades. The fact is, most fans—even some coaches and players—aren't aware of the issue because, unless you're a quarterback (or a punter or a kicker, I suppose) you aren't a part of the discussion.

Here's some context. When I was in the NFL, between 1984 and '97, games were played with 24 brand-spanking-new balls, right out of the box. They were as hard as rocks. Wilson packs a great football with a beautiful sheen, but if it's a cold, rainy day or a humid afternoon and your hands are sweating, that sheen becomes slippery and you have less control. I know Aaron Rodgers says he prefers his footballs as hard as can be, but you won't find a quarterback in the world who'd prefer playing with a brand-new football. All of us quarterbacks are insane people with very particular routines, and throughout the league there grew a battle for control over what balls would feel like going into each game.

In 2006, Peyton Manning and, ironically, Tom Brady (*right*) finally lobbied the Competition Committee to give QBs more control over game-day balls. Visiting teams were allowed to supply 12 of their own, prepared however they liked; home teams supplied another dozen. And that's why it's been surprising to me to see Deflategate blown out of proportion: Quarterbacks have had a say in what their game-day balls look like for almost 10 years. This is nothing new. But I get it; deflating or manipulating beyond league standards is troublesome, and that's why the Patriots' reputation is on the line.

As I watched Bill Belichick's press conference last Saturday, I couldn't help but think he's really moved all of his chips into the center of the table. His absolute confidence that the

Patriots did everything according to code adds another layer of intrigue; it puts his entire legacy on the line. Perhaps even more important: He's putting his owner, Bob Kraft, on the plank as well. Integrity shouldn't be taken lightly in this case.

To me, there are plenty of little



things like this in sports that fall outside a coach's realm. This issue is between the referees, the equipment guys and the QBs. To suggest that Belichick had something to do with this? Absurd. After Spygate, and considering New England's continued success, people are trying to jump on anything that could implicate this team as cheaters.

Ultimately, everyone is looking for an edge in football. Sometimes that involves pushing the envelope within the rules. Other times it falls outside the rule book—like PEDs, which I don't put on the same level as this. Some linemen coat their arms with Vaseline. Other guys, back in the day, used Stickum. I don't see any asterisks by their records.

The control over and tinkering with footballs isn't cheating. This is a battle that's been going on, behind the scenes, for years. And counting. □

DIVERSION PROGRAM

IV



Perhaps the distraction that started it all. On the Tuesday before the Chiefs faced the Vikings, NBC released a report connecting a known gambler with Kansas City quarterback **Len Dawson**. At a late-night press conference Dawson admitted he had a cursory relationship with the man but denied any wrongdoing. Years later Dawson would say the controversy didn't provide him any added motivation, but he was the MVP of the Chiefs' 23-7 victory.

XX



The '85 Bears delighted in creating off-field headlines, and they were in rare form on their trip to New Orleans. Upon arriving in the Big Easy, QB **Jim McMahon** publicly excoriated the team's front office for failing to bring an acupuncturist on the team plane to aid his recovery from a gluteal injury. Then, at a practice, McMahon showed off his injury by mooning a news helicopter. Of course, the following Sunday it was the Patriots' butts that were sore.



XXIII

On the afternoon before the Super Bowl, Bengals running back **Stanley Wilson** told teammates he was going to his hotel room to get his playbook. He was found later that day, recumbent in his bathtub after a cocaine binge. It was a sad relapse for a once promising player and resulted in his being cut from the roster. Cincy coach Sam Wyche later said Wilson's absence was a key factor in the loss to the 49ers.

XXVII

"This is going to be bigger than the actual game," Magic Johnson said in an interview after his bodyguard allegedly punched Bills linebacker **Darryl Talley** a week before the game. Talley was out with teammates at a Sunset Boulevard nightclub when the altercation took place. Talley wasn't finished absorbing punishment: Buffalo lost to the Cowboys 52-17, the third of four consecutive Super Bowl losses for the Bills.

XXXVII

San Diego is only 16 miles from the Mexican border, something that may not have been forefront in Raiders players' minds as they were preparing to face the Buccaneers. But then starting center **Barret Robbins** disappeared two days before the game, allegedly while on a alcohol-fueled bender in Tijuana. As a result he was suspended for the game; he was reportedly in a hospital while his teammates were being dismantled by Tampa Bay.



XLII

Two days before the Patriots met the Giants, former New England video assistant Matt Walsh claimed he had damning information about the months-old Spygate scandal—but he refused to disclose what he knew. Also, Senator Arlen Specter said Roger Goodell would be called to testify on why he destroyed the Patriots' tapes. In the end, David Tyree's helmet was the greater concern for **Bill Belichick**.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: AP; BETTMANN/ORBIS; NYC MILITON/GETTY IMAGES; NFL/AP; JOHN IACONO/SPORTS ILLUSTRATED; AMY SANDETTA/AP; CARLO ALLEGRI/REUTERS; DAVID ELLIOTT/KANSAS CITY STAR/MCT/ANDOW; MATTHEW WEST/BOSTON HERALD/POLARIS; BRAD MANGIN FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED



DEFLATEGATE SOUNDS BIZARRE, BUT IT'S PART OF A HALLOWED SUPER BOWL WEEK TRADITION: THE FOOTBALL-FOCUS-SAPPING DISTRACTION

+ BY BEN BASKIN

XXXI

For **Brett Favre** 1996 was a year of extremes: He was named league MVP that season but also underwent treatment for a prescription-drug addiction. So it was more than a little newsworthy when the Packers' QB was reportedly spotted,



beer in hand, on Bourbon Street the night before the game. It didn't affect his play. He had three total touchdowns in a win over the Patriots.



XXXIII

The day before the game, Falcons safety Eugene Robinson was presented with an award for his "high moral character." A few hours later he was charged with soliciting oral sex from an undercover police officer in downtown Miami. One anonymous teammate said, "Guys had been going there all week. It's just that Eugene was the only one who got caught." Fans were less forgiving when Atlanta lost to Denver.

XLV

On the Tuesday before the game, TMZ caught Steelers QB **Ben Roethlisberger** out with teammates at a piano bar in Fort Worth. The site released footage of Big Ben struggling to croon "Piano Man" and reported that players pounded rum and Diet Cokes. Roethlisberger laughed it off. Less funny: His two INTs that prevented the Steelers from winning a third ring in six seasons.



XLVIII

The national media will be reminded this week: **Marshawn Lynch** doesn't like talking to reporters. This was a problem last year when the Seahawks' running back threatened to skip Media Day. After much hand-wringing Lynch showed up, and while hiding behind a dais that some teammates sat on, he delivered one of his many witticisms: That was when we all learned that Beast Mode is "just 'bout that action, boss."





EVERY SUNDAY IS SUPER BOWL SUNDAY

Snake drafts and keeper leagues, rinky-dink payouts and dime-store trophies—that's all so yesterday. The way fantasy sports are increasingly being played, each new morning brings a new chance to cash in. *Big-time*

BY ALBERT CHEN

Illustration by
Darrow



HIGH NOON at the Cosmo in Vegas, and the eight cinema-scale TVs wrapped around the room flicker like the video screens in Times Square. The bros lounging on the couches down beverages at a tailgater's pace, the sharks hold court at the bar, a Playboy bunny—it's never explained how she got the invite—sashays through the glittery, chandelier-lit ballroom. Men cheer and groan and clamor on about stacks, fades, FPPGs, Odell Beckham Jr.'s insane ROI and how any knucklehead who doesn't have Derek Anderson in his lineup—the best QB value play of the day—may as well hit the Bellagio tables next door because he's screwed, absolutely screwed. Occasional roaring eruptions drown out the game broadcast that's blaring over the speakers; in one pocket of the room a 45-yard Mason Crosby field goal is celebrated as if it's the first moon landing. Projected on a JumboTron-sized screen, refreshed every few seconds, come the live scoring and standings: The Super Bowl of daily fantasy sports (DFS) is in full swing, and the lineups to beat belong to Wanker14 and 3rd_and_Schlong.

"I was up all night," says the pro known as KillaB2482, his eyes fixed on the screen showing Giants-Redskins. (He's rolling with a Giants stack of Beckham and Eli Manning.) "I did the most research I've ever done." KillaB began playing daily fantasy sports six years ago, back when it was a niche hobby like taxidermy or genealogy. But over the last year, DFS—a faster, more addictive, potentially more lucrative iteration of traditional fantasy games—has experienced a boom that's bringing cash and new players to the industry in unprecedented numbers, as well as providing gainful employment to the sports-obsessed fan with a mathematical cast of mind. A pro like KillaB can pocket tens of thousands of dollars on a given day. Or, just as easily, lose it. A week earlier KillaB (Brett Hartfiel, 32, of Minneapolis, a top-five-ranked DFS player) lost \$120,000. Every Sunday, though, is a new opportunity for a big score, and here he is, mid-December, in a room of 75 qualifiers—a testosterone-charged brew of pros, wannabe pros and amateurs, many of whom, until just a few months ago, were unaware that this world existed—at the FanDuel Fantasy Football Championship (FFFC). Each player gets one lineup, one shot at a share of the \$10 million purse, with the winner's take at \$2 million.

Another eruption: an Aaron Rodgers pick in Buffalo, where the big upset of Week 15 is brewing. The crowd cheers and groans, and the conversa-



QUICK HITS

\$2M

First-place prize for winning the 2014 FanDuel Fantasy Football Championship.

\$15K

Prize paid to each FFFC finisher between 72nd and 100th (last) place.

\$2

Cheapest entry fee for an FFFC qualifier event, at which one winner earned an invite to the final event.

tion at the bar turns to the rumor that professional bettor Billy Walters, godfather of Vegas sports gambling, put \$5 million on the Bills a few days ago and single-handedly swung the Buffalo-Green Bay line from 6½ to 4. "When I heard that, I faded the Ravens and bought the Bills' D," says a thirty-something holding a plate stacked with glistening slabs of prime rib. His Johnny Manziel jersey and pants that resemble pajama bottoms seem perfectly appropriate for this daylong bacchanalia of fantasy sports. "It's my birthday, but if I win the \$2 million, I'll send Billy a gift."

BELIEVE IT or not, the fantasy sports universe continues to expand. There were 40.5 million fantasy players across all sports in 2014, a figure that's more than doubled over the last seven years. But the industry is changing: Fantasy sports of the traditional variety—draft a team, then manage your lineup through the slog of a full regular season—have become an old man's game. The generation of fans that became fantasy-obsessed with the rise of the Internet in the late 1990s, the dudes who fell in love with live snake drafts and five-hour auctions and the day-to-day micromanaging of a single team over a full season—all for the reward of bragging rights, a cheesy trophy, maybe a few hundred bucks—are now in their 40s. Their teenage children, meanwhile, live in a world of 140-character quips, six-second videos and instant gratification; theirs is a generation for which the idea of playing one game over several months seems as thrilling as Parcheesi.

"This is going to be *the* thing," says emcee Bob Harris, who's standing at a table in the Cosmo ballroom, his eyes darting among 10 early games, the tweets on his smartphone and the iPad he's



using to track today's live scoring. "I've been playing fantasy football since 1983," adds the bald, bantering fantasy sports pundit, a sort of James Carville for the DFS world. "I'm in 26 leagues now. I've seen the evolution of fantasy. I see all the weaknesses that piss people off. Daily fantasy fixes it all. It's not just a fad. It's the future."

The rules for DFS—for NFL games, as well as NBA, NHL, MLB, MMA, NASCAR, college basketball and football, golf and soccer—are simple: Every real-life athlete is assigned a salary, and every lineup is subjected to a salary cap. Once you've assembled a lineup, you win or lose based on the performances of your players that day. You cash out the next morning, then start all over again. Participants compete in head-to-head cash games for anywhere from \$1 to \$5,000 or in tournaments, where only a top percentage of finishers win money but take higher payouts—up to \$1 million off a single entry on an NFL regular-season Sunday.

"If the NFL is looking for its [most ardent] audience, this is where they find it," says Harris. "There's not a more passionate group." The DFS demographic is young (the median age is 15 years younger than that of the traditional player), male (more than 90%), mobile (over 70% play on their phones) and college-educated with disposable income. Four years ago 12 finalists squeezed into a Las Vegas hotel suite for the inaugural FFFC, and "the winner ran around the room pumping his fist after winning \$25,000," says Cal Spears (aka Braskey), a finals qualifier in 2010 and '14. "Now \$25,000 is an afterthought." Last year's FFFC, with a \$3 million prize pool, was a watershed moment in the evolution of DFS from time-sucking diversion to viable profession. Pros (many of them transplants from the poker world) make up a small subset of the DFS

THE OL' HIGH-LOW

At the FFFC, a field goal or a fumble can make or break a finalist.

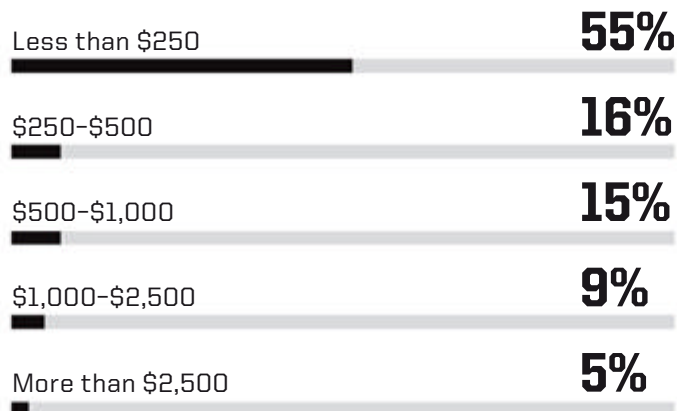
player pool, but with their high volume of entries, they provide DFS companies with a large portion of their revenues. Given today's rising prize pools, pros can now routinely compete in high-stakes weekly tournaments and win up to \$1 million—what players call "life-changing money."

"There's never been a bigger change in our industry than what's happened with daily fantasy," says Paul Charchian, president of the Fantasy Sports Trade Association. "We've had more investment in the fantasy industry over the last year than we've had in the entire history of the industry."

FanDuel, the industry leader in DFS with more than one million paying players, a market share of 75% and \$57 million in total revenue in 2014, raised \$70 million in venture capital last year; DraftKings, which entered the space in '12 and represents FanDuel's biggest competition, raised \$41 million. Rival sites are cropping up like weeds (SPORTS ILLUSTRATED owns the DFS provider FanNation), but FanDuel and DraftKings make up 95% of the market and have such loyal followings that it may be too late for even a media behemoth to become a serious player without acquiring either of the mainstays. That lead was built with an all-out

SNAPSHOT

Average daily winnings by DFS players



Source: Fantasy Sports Trade Association

advertising assault (the two have spent upwards of \$70 million combined on marketing; *see chart, page 39*) and shrewd alliances with teams and leagues, each deal a further validation and endorsement of a fledgling sector.

Last year MLB announced a sponsorship deal with DraftKings and the creation of “official mini fantasy games” like the ones for the NFL, in which players set a daily lineup. (MLB’s version is free; prizes include tickets and memorabilia.) DraftKings has since added partnerships with the NHL, three NBA teams and the Patriots, marking the first involvement of an NFL team. And FanDuel recently struck deals with the Redskins, Jets, seven NBA teams and, in the most significant industry accord to date, a four-year partnership with the NBA itself, including an equity stake in the fantasy company. “For those of us that have been in the industry since the beginning, this was the tipping point,” says Dan Back, the lead analyst at RotoGrinders, which offers DFS players oceans of statistically driven analysis. “The NBA is saying, Not only do we support daily fantasy games, but we believe in it so much that we want a piece of the endgame.”

ON THE eve of the FFFC, a 33-year-old personal fitness trainer from Pasadena named Scott Hanson sat awake in his hotel room with his wife, Danielle, fast asleep while he scanned a color-coded spreadsheet on his laptop. At 3:30 a.m. he was assessing the return on investment (ROI) of Bengals rookie running back Jeremy Hill.

Until September, Hanson was like most Americans: He’d never heard of daily fantasy. He and Danielle saw a FanDuel commercial during an NFL game (“Hey, you’re pretty good at that; why don’t you try it out and make some money for us?” Danielle suggested to him), and the following week Scott deposited \$15 into a tournament. He finished out of the money. He tried again the week after and failed again. But in Week 5 he turned a single \$5 entry into a first-place finish among 57,000 lineups and won \$15,000.

Having tasted success, Hanson began treating his new hobby as a second job. He built a system to identify undervalued players based on their salary, past performance (as measured by fantasy points per game, FPPG) and projected output. He began listening to RotoGrinders podcasts in his spare time. He started investing \$1,000 every week into multiple lineups on various sites, and by finishing first at a qualifying tournament in Week 8 (“the



DAILY SHOW

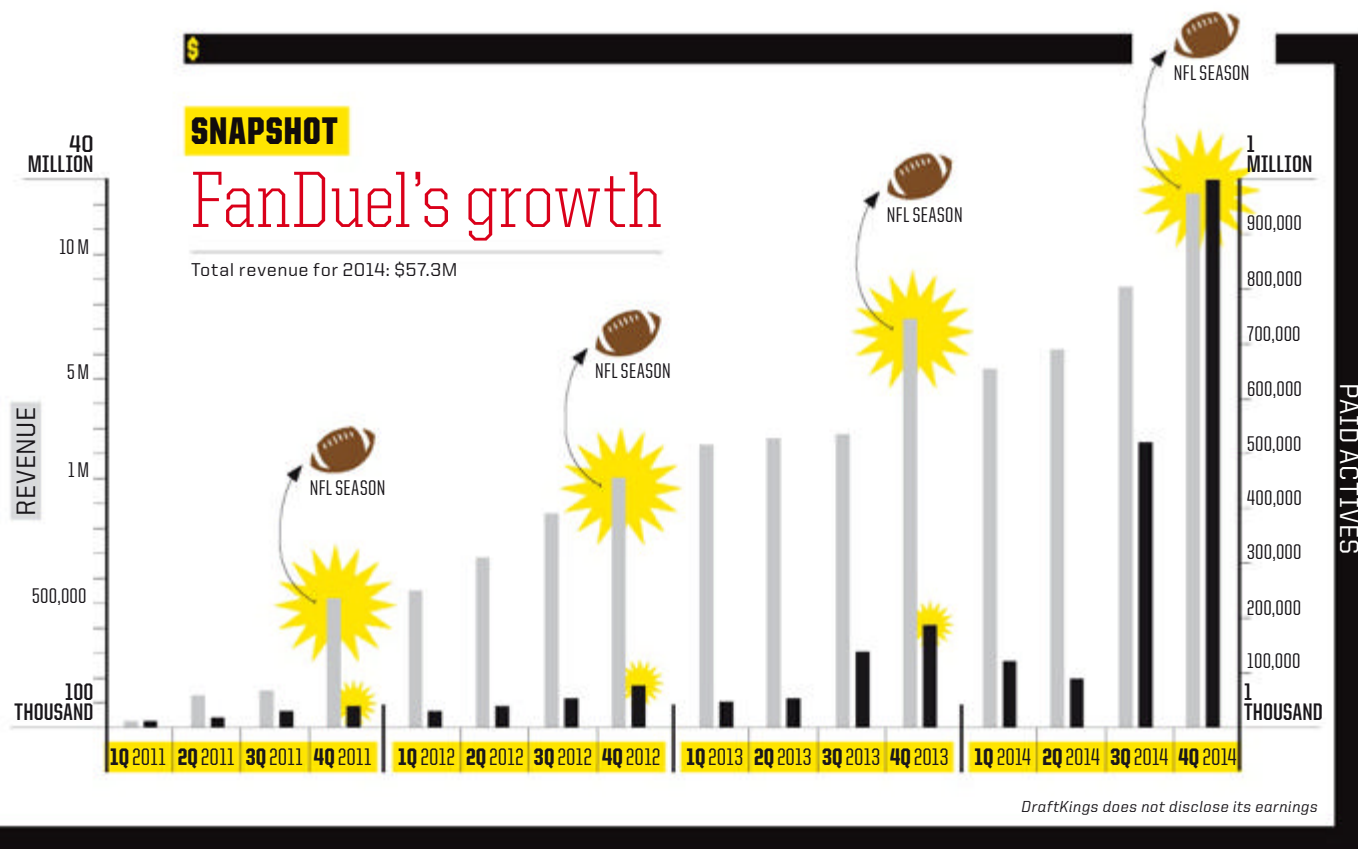
The brainchild of Eccles (from Northern Ireland, left) and Griffiths (Wales), FanDuel had barely 3,000 paying users in early 2011. Now? More than a million and rising.



week Ben Roethlisberger went off”), he won a seat at the Vegas finals. “You learn pretty quickly that if you’re good at it, yeah, you can make quite a bit of money,” Hanson says.

Some dismiss daily fantasy as nothing more than a dice game, but that analogy doesn’t hold up. DFS is strategic, and it can be unforgiving to the casual participant who chooses players based on emotion, media narratives and hometown favoritism. Often that participant is facing analytically inclined opponents who rely on game theory and probability to calculate their likelihood of winning from an assortment of variables: injuries, coaching tendencies, weather. Smart risk-taking and attentiveness are rewarded. And advantage can be gained by tracking updates from beat reporters, who are the first to know if a player had bad sushi the night before, leading to the promotion of a rookie no one has heard of.

Johnny Manziel’s being named midweek as the Browns’ starting quarterback is the big news leading up to the Week 15 Sunday games that play out at the FFFC. Player salaries are established at the beginning of the week. By rule, no calibrations are made to reflect injuries or late-breaking news; as a result, many of the pros view Johnny Football, who’s priced like a backup, as a value pick compared with, say, Andrew Luck or Aaron Rodgers at premium dollars. Earlier in the week, while he was scavenging the Web, Hanson had come across



a far less obvious lead, a story in which Bengals offensive coordinator Hue Jackson told reporters that he might use one feature back instead of his typical committee of rushers against the Browns. Taking this as a tacit endorsement of Hill, Hanson decided to roll with the rising star.

The decision pays off, big: Hill scores two first-half touchdowns in Cleveland, and Escot4 (Hanson), the only player with Hill in his lineup, rockets to the top of the standings during the day's early games. Meanwhile, it takes about two ugly incompletions for everyone to see that this will be a very long day for Manziel and the pros who believed in his upside.

Later, with the second slate of games in full swing, KillaB is the only remaining pro with a shot at big money (Beckham is having a monster outing against Washington), but it's Escot4 in the lead, with Beez1973 breathing down his neck. "I had eight weeks to prepare for this, and it's great to see the hard work pay off," says Beez, a self-employed utilities trader from outside Toronto. "I'm analytical, a total stats guy. In my profession, you hit a big utility, you make a ton of money." It's early, but for the moment he's in second place, his name slotted next to the \$1 million second-place prize. "You've got to remember, it's all about value. You've got to stay focused," he says with great conviction, though, admittedly, it's not exactly clear if he's talking energy futures or undervalued tight ends.

QUICK HITS

500K

Total fantasy sports participants in 1988, when the Fantasy Sports Trade Association began keeping data.

40.5M

Total fantasy sports participants (daily and traditional) in 2014.

YOU MIGHT expect to find a group of sports-obsessed programmers behind the fantasy world's party of the year, but the five founders of FanDuel are entrepreneurs from the United Kingdom, a mix of consultants and academics who got bitten by the startup bug. "We weren't sports fans—not even soccer," jokes FanDuel's marketing director, Lesley Eccles, about herself and her husband, Nigel, the company's CEO. Seven years ago Lesley urged Nigel to leave his job at McKinsey and pursue his entrepreneurial dreams, and the Eccleses teamed with three business acquaintances to launch a website that offered news-prediction games. The site, Hubdub, attracted nearly 100,000 users, but a small problem remained: It didn't make money. Looking to pivot into a more profitable venture, the team considered the sports-prediction business. At Hubdub they'd found that even though politics and celebrity gossip were their more heavily promoted verticals, sports was always their most popular. They studied American fantasy sports and were amazed to see the industry was losing its younger demographic. For such a robust industry, there was a surprising "lack of disruption and innovation that we thought needed to be addressed," says Tom Griffiths, now FanDuel's chief product officer.

The FanDuel group was not the first to imagine fantasy games that compressed the traditional seasonlong model into a single day, but it was the first

dedicated startup to pump significant resources into developing a daily fantasy site. The company's light-bulb moment, according to Griffiths, came during a marketing session with a "gruff gentleman from the Bronx" who had been shown FanDuel's simple interface listing players and their salaries. "He said it looked like something his 12-year-old nephew would do," says Griffiths, "and I was like, *Damn, another one who doesn't like it.* Then we asked him if he would pay \$5 to play this game if he could win some money. He said, 'Well, that's an entirely different question.'" The group found that people were more than happy to pay to enhance their sports consumption experience. "People see the cash that people are winning [on FanDuel] and they say, 'These are gamblers; these guys are out to find a loophole,'" says Griffiths. "But it's really not that at all. It's simple: They play because it makes watching games more exciting."

While DraftKings holds strong ties to the poker industry (it sponsors the World Poker Tour), it's clear that FanDuel wants to distance itself from gambling, having recently capped daily deposits at \$10,000. Instead, it's focused on attracting casual fans who don't mind losing, say, \$25 for the entertainment value—fans who will ultimately determine whether the industry reaches a mass market. That goal remains a considerable challenge: Still only one out of every 40 traditional fantasy players participates in DFS. There also remain lingering legal questions, compelling FanDuel to carefully toe the line: They issue 1099s to players who win more than \$600 and exclude residents of five states from cash games because of local legislation. (Washington, for example, prohibits all Internet gaming.) Some also believe that daily fantasy benefits from the ban on legal sports betting outside of Nevada, and that if that ban is ever lifted, daily fantasy will face a downturn.

"We're still in the early days of a relatively new sector, with a lot of variables yet in play," says Adam Krejciak, an industry analyst with Eilers Research. "It's obvious that fantasy is a cultural phenomenon, but whether *daily* fantasy can penetrate is the million-dollar question. You could argue that it has the upside to almost become a media of its own—a disruptive consumer-technology industry that changes how we watch and consume sports."

The upside is higher than anyone imagined just a year ago. Eilers now estimates that the number

CHECK, MATE

Hanson (second from right) made his first \$10 DFS bet early this season; by December he and Danielle were hoisting a jumbo FFFC payout.



of active daily players could reach seven million by 2020, with participants spending as much as \$17 billion per year. While participation in daily NFL games is highest, the bigger growth opportunities lie in the NBA and the NHL, leagues without strong traditional fantasy games and with younger fan demographics. Even MLB, with its older-skewing audience, is a potential gold mine, given its 162-game season. "Daily is going to continue to grow, but I'd be surprised if, in the next few years, it overtakes seasonlong fantasy football, which has a huge social component where you have husbands and wives and coworkers playing," says Back. "But in basketball and baseball, I'd be surprised if it *didn't* overtake [seasonlong games]."

For the home offices of the NBA and MLB, the appeal of DFS is clear: more eyeballs, plus an opportunity to reach younger fans and close the gap with the NFL. "What's been perhaps most eye-opening," says Griffiths, "is that 15% of our users have never played fantasy of *any* kind; daily fantasy is bringing in a new audience. We always talk about the 40 million [total] fantasy players as the market opportunity—but we can go outside of that, to the 200 million sports fans just in North America."

The mainstreaming of fantasy sports is FanDuel's focus. Ultimately, the company (whose staff has doubled to 120 in the past six months) sees itself at the center of an ecosystem of fans, advertisers, broadcasters and teams, all helping to create a "virtuous circle," providing a product that, in making the games we watch more interactive and more exciting, makes everyone happier. They envision giving fans the ultimate second-screen experience from their couch and at live games. "ESPN changed sports consumption by giving local news a national platform," says Matt King, FanDuel's CFO. "I think you can analogize us to that—this generation's ESPN—in the sense that we have tailored a product that allows people to consume sports [the way] they want to today, which is different than the way they've always consumed sports. If we can do our job, we will make the market far bigger than everyone thought it would be."

ANY DONKEY can win a tournament," says KillaB. "There's a ton of variance in the short run, particularly in a one-day tournament. But like any skill, in the long run the cream will always rise to the top."

At the Cosmo, the final slate of afternoon games is coming to a close, and it's becoming clear that KillaB will finish out of the big money—



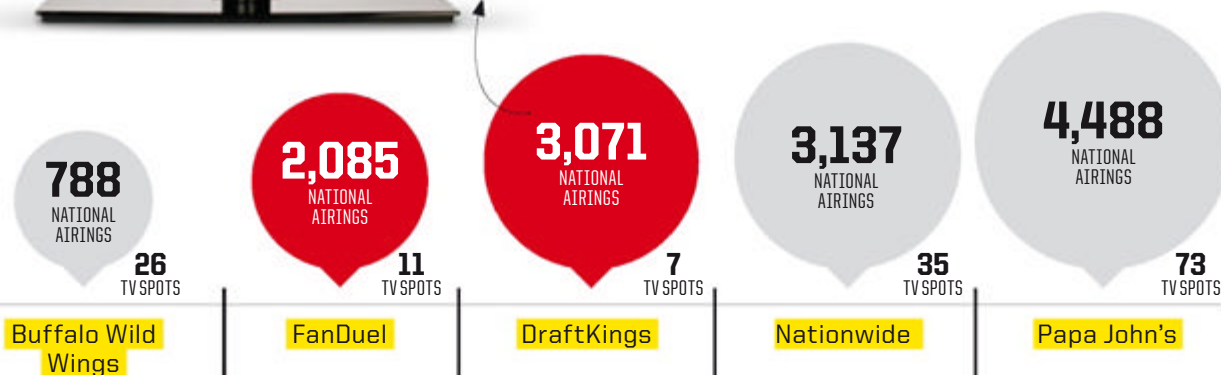
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SNAPSHOT

DFS advertising

Papa John's, Nationwide . . . *FanDuel*? In a quest for name recognition, the top two daily fantasy sites have their TV commercials in heavy rotation

Source: iSpot.tv



blame Jamaal Charles's dud of an afternoon—though he'll still end up pocketing \$40,000 for his 23rd-place finish, the best showing among the pros. There's a hint of disappointment in his voice, but overall 2014 was a very good year for KillaB. "For a long time I was a poker player that enjoyed playing daily fantasy [on the side]," he says, "but next year I'm thinking of doing only the World Series of Poker. I've done well enough to make [DFS] a full-time job." As proof, he says he's in the process of hiring two workers who are ready to leave behind six-figure jobs to work as analysts.

A final eruption in the ballroom: ear-numbing, beer-fueled chants of *DE-LANE-EE! DE-LANE-EE!* All eyes are on the Titans-Jets game, as the most meaningless Week 15 matchup has become the most meaningful of the FFFC. Tennessee's Delanie Walker, it turns out, was a popular pick at tight end and, after the refs have added two seconds to the clock in this dreadful game between 2–11 teams, Walker picks up 33 junk-time yards on a lateral as time expires. With that lone play, one contestant jumps from eighth to third place—a \$400,000 difference. "This is so ridiculous," says Tirella12, the head of IT at a nonprofit in Boston who made an extra \$10,000 on the Walker catch. "People ask me if this is luck, and I say, 'Well, I spend 30 to 40 hours on

QUICK HITS

\$2B

Predicted daily fantasy spending in 2015—roughly matching the amount to be wagered then on sports in Las Vegas—according to a report by Eilers Research.

2.5

Percent of traditional fantasy players who participate in daily games.

it a week. . . . But yeah, sometimes it's luck.' ”

First place, however, has long been decided: As the Jets celebrate reaching 3–11, Scott Hanson stands on the stage holding a \$2 million prop check, thanks largely to Hill's breakout game for Cincy. FanDuel has its Madison Avenue moment: *Personal trainer turns \$5 into \$2,000,000 with fantasy games. You can too!*

Soon, perhaps, it will be upon us, the day when fans everywhere follow sporting events with one eye on their smartphone as they root for their team—not the local team they grew up idolizing or the one they hand-picked in August, but the one they drafted two minutes before kickoff. It was easy to visualize that kind of future after a day at the Cosmo, especially if you'd just won the largest prize in fantasy sports history. Just a few days after his big score, Hanson was already talking like a seasoned pro as he explained his strategy, going forward, of putting “\$35,000 as a baseline, and whatever I make on top of that, I'd cash out 80% and add to my bankroll.” One week after the FFFC, Hanson submitted \$10,000 worth of NFL lineups to FanDuel.

“I have a goal of making at least \$200,000 in the next calendar year,” he said. “Stay-at-home dads do this for a living. I could see that as a possibility for me down the road. That sounds like living the dream, doesn't it?” □



+

RISING SENIOR

Wright's decision to stay in school improved his draft stock and has positioned him to land with a degree in sociology.

KEEP CHOPPING WOOD

The mantra from his Montana boyhood has enabled coach Larry Krystkowiak to persevere over the past four seasons, as he's worked to take Utah basketball from historically bad to Final Four good



BY LUKE WINN

Photographs by
Greg Nelson
For Sports Illustrated



APRIL 21 AND April 22, 2014, were not momentous days for college basketball. The biggest stories were that Southern Miss coach Donnie Tyndall was hired by Tennessee for a rebuilding job that would require patience, and Kentucky's Julius Randle officially stated that he was turning pro (a foregone conclusion that would drop the talent-rich Wildcats to a . . . No. 1 preseason ranking). But behind the scenes at Utah, this was the most critical 34-hour stretch of its four-year resuscitation—a campaign that has seen the Utes go from historically awful in coach Larry Krystkowiak's debut season of 2011–12 to a No. 11 ranking this year.

On the morning of the 21st, Utes assistant coach Andy Hill received an email from Martina Poeltl, the head of accounting for Austria's Federal Economic Chamber. Poeltl had, after exchanging 1,000 messages with institutions in the U.S., decided that Utah would be the recipient of a coveted export: her 7-foot, 18-year-old son, Jakob. His exposure on English-language recruiting websites was next to *nix*, but Hill thought he was a five-star-caliber center who could help the Utes reach the NCAA tournament for the first time since 2009. The Utes had put in the work—Hill had discovered Poeltl at FIBA's European U18 B-Division championships in Macedonia in July 2013, and Krystkowiak subsequently made two visits to Vienna—but they also caught a break. Poeltl had initially leaned toward Cal, but the March 31 retirement of Bears coach Mike Montgomery changed the race. (Perhaps it was karma: Krystkowiak starred for Montgomery at Montana in the 1980s.)

Later on the 21st, Krystkowiak and Hill were at Los Angeles's Cathedral High for a game, and they began talking about Utah's most valuable player, 6' 5", L.A.-born point guard Delon Wright, who had tweeted in March that he was staying in college for his senior season. He had told the same thing to the coaching staff. Midconversation, Krystkowiak's iPhone buzzed with a text.

“Oh, God,” he said upon reading it.

The elation he’d felt about Poeltl’s decision disappeared. In its place: nausea. The text was from Wright: “I’m putting my name in the draft.”

“Whatever you do,” Krystkowiak texted back, “don’t call the NBA and make it official. I’m coming back tomorrow.” He hardly slept that night, writing notes on a yellow legal pad in preparation for a 2 p.m. meeting with Wright. This was not a coach trying to persuade a lottery pick to spend one more season in college; Wright was a projected second-rounder who had averaged 15.5 points, 5.3 assists and 6.8 rebounds but shot just 22.2% from behind the arc. His whole family—including his older brother, Dorell, a small forward with the Trail Blazers—thought he should stay at Utah, finish his degree and improve his draft stock. Delon has a contrarian streak, however. He had committed to Utah in 2012 against the advice of friends in L.A., and now, as he followed draft news, he believed he was better than several guards who had decided to enter the draft. “I just felt like it was the perfect time to go,” he says now.

At the meeting in Krystkowiak’s office, the coach told Wright that this was the time for analysis, not emotion. “Staying may not be the easy way,” Krystkowiak said, “but it’s your best choice.” They talked about what Wright still needed to prove to scouts; what Poeltl would bring to the team; and how the exposure of an NCAA tournament run could help Wright’s pro prospects. In regard to the Pac-12 race, Krystkowiak said, “With you I think we can win it.”

They were scheduled to call the NBA’s draft advisory committee at 4 p.m. to gather its input. As the time neared, Wright didn’t want to go through with the call. Krystkowiak initially misinterpreted this as defiance. “No,” Wright said. “Everything from the last two hours makes sense. I want to come back.” Krystkowiak jumped out of his chair, came around his desk and hugged him.

Nine months later Poeltl (8.9 points, 7.9 rebounds, 64.1 field goal percentage)

is excelling as Utah’s starting center and might be a future lottery pick. Wright has been such an efficient stat-sheet stuffer—averaging 14.6 points and 6.1 assists, with a stunning 129.9 offensive rating—that he’s no longer on best-guys-you-haven’t-noticed lists. He’s a top five candidate for the Wooden Award, and maybe the nation’s best all-around guard. He’s content with his decision to stay in Salt Lake City. A few of the guards who had caused him to consider entering the draft, he says, didn’t even make NBA rosters. He’s also proving Krystkowiak’s forecast correct: With Wright leading the way, the Utes are tied with preseason favorite Arizona for the Pac-12 lead—and they have a shot to finish with their best record since another transcendent point guard, Andre Miller, led them to the national-title game in 1998.

APPRECIATING THIS Utah team requires grasping how bad it was during the slog of 2011–12. The Utes went 6–25, and their adjusted-efficiency ranking was 297th, the worst of any major-conference team in kenpom.com’s database that covers the last 14 seasons. In Basketball Reference’s Simple Rating System, which is based on scoring margin and schedule strength, the Utes ranked 284th, lower than any major-conference school in history. It was Krystkowiak’s first season after being hired away from an assistant job with the Nets; he had just four returning players, and the rest of the roster was cobbled together from recruiting-market leftovers. He then lost his starting center, senior David Foster, to a broken foot in the exhibition opener (an inauspicious loss to Division II Adams State). That January, after more injuries and a 40-point loss



FOREIGN AID

Poeltl (42), a 7-footer from Austria, has helped Krystkowiak’s Utes become title contenders for the first time in 16 seasons.



at Colorado that sent the Utes to 3–10, Krystkowiak announced he would hold walk-on tryouts to find reinforcements.

“We got inundated with emails and calls,” says assistant coach Tommy Connor, who was assigned to vet the hopefuls. They took one—junior Ryan Osterloh, a business major and former All-State guard at nearby Skyline High who’d been playing in rec leagues—but it was indicative of the state of the program that many students thought they



Many students
thought they
could help the
program **despite**
answering “No”
when asked,
“Did you play
any high school
basketball?”

could help despite answering “No” when asked, “Did you play any high school basketball?” As the losses stacked up and the season deteriorated further—leading scorer Josh (Jiggy) Watkins was kicked off the team on Jan. 18 for missing practices—Krystkowiak avoided losing his mind by adhering to a mantra from his Montana boyhood: *Keep chopping wood*. His older brother, Bernie, was more demonstrative, sparring with fans in the comments sections of a Utah blog, BlockU.com. “My brother is a damn fine coach and your bile is bull----,” Bernie responded to one jab early that season. “Get on board or get off the train!”

The train was moving, albeit slowly. On the first day that he had been allowed to recruit after being hired on April 3, 2011, Krystkowiak went to West Jordan High to see junior small forward Jordan Loveridge, who’d been told by Utah’s

previous coach, Jim Boylen, that he wasn’t a Pac-12-level player. Krystkowiak offered Loveridge a scholarship later that day; he ascended into the national top 100 recruiting rankings the following summer, committed to the Utes and became a Day One starter—and valuable wing scorer—in 2012–13. He and fellow freshman Brandon Taylor, an L.A. point guard with a high defensive IQ, helped Utah finish 15–18 that season. Wright, who was recruited out of City College of San Francisco, arrived the following season and lifted the Utes to the NIT. Their 21–12 record included eight losses by four points or less—a problem that Krystkowiak thought could be remedied with some lessons about toughness and communication.

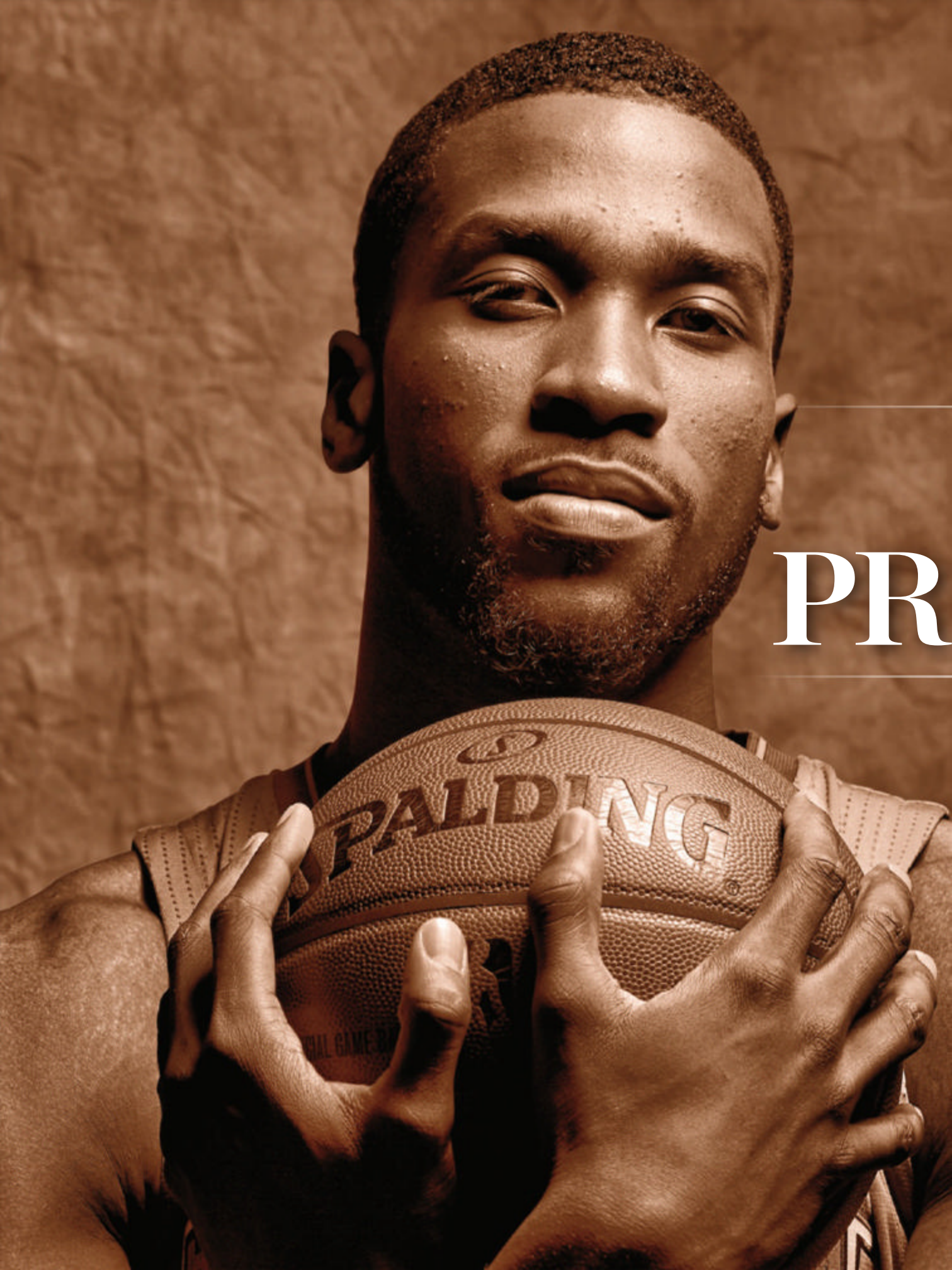
In September, Krystkowiak brought in two former Navy SEALs to put the Utes through a “hell weekend,” during which they were subjected to grueling, team-oriented training exercises. Wright says the process made Krystkowiak, who’d wanted to be a military man before his height (6’ 9”) got in the way, “so excited, it was like he was a kid again.” Krystkowiak continues to refer to the SEALs during practice, particularly with regard to defensive precision. During an uncharacteristic breakdown in a practice earlier this month, he stopped a drill and said, “I’m not saying much today, but when I am, you’ve gotta be listening. Good thing we’re not Navy SEALs, because we’d all have our asses shot up right now.” The Utes have mostly absorbed the message: Their predominantly man-to-man defense ranks sixth in the nation in efficiency on the strength of disciplined ball-screen coverage, Wright’s knack for anticipating passes (he ranks 29th in steal percentage) and Poeltl’s reach (he ranks 54th in block percentage). Their biggest win to date was a 69–68 white-knuckler over No. 8 Wichita State on Dec. 3, in which they got three key stops in overtime, and Wright—who had faltered in clutch moments as a junior—hit the go-ahead bucket with 14 seconds left.

AMONG THE questions Krystkowiak asked Wright during their April 22 meeting was, “Is there any part of you that wants to finish this for the program?” Wright stayed to complete Utah’s revival—and his own academic comeback. On Dec. 19, Wright handed in a test in a research methods class that completed requirements for his sociology degree, setting him up to be the second college graduate in his family. (His mother, Stacy, an LAPD property officer, received a degree from the University of Phoenix last summer.) Those close to Wright are stunned by his academic progress; just three years earlier, his father and Dorell warned him that he was on the verge of blowing his hoops career due to his poor grades.

His on-court success has not been a surprise. In the summer of 2013, Wright played on a summer league team with Dorell and Chris Young, a former assistant at Leuzinger High in Lawndale, Calif., the Wrights’ alma mater, and wowed them by scoring 17 points against a squad that featured the Pacers’ Paul George and the Raptors’ DeMar DeRozan. “The light had switched on,” says Young, who also coached the late-blooming Russell Westbrook at Leuzinger. “It was like with Russell, where you could see it in his eyes. We watched Delon and were like, Is he about to get really, really good?”

Young had questioned whether Utah was the right place for Wright, feeling he was capable of starring for a program with a more recent tradition of winning. The thinking was, if he could light up a summer league team against pros, why not join a title contender? “Delon heard that and brushed it off as calmly as he plays,” Young says. “His expression was like, Chill out. I’ve got this.”

Wright listened to this recollection following a Jan. 4 win over UCLA. “What I would tell people back then was, I can see myself at Utah,” he says. He’s admired—especially by the coaching staff—as a point guard with great basketball instincts, and from the start, Wright had a notion that the Utes could thrive with him as the playmaker. “And just look,” he says, “where we’re at now.” □



PR



THREE MINUTES and 20 seconds into this season, Hornets small forward Michael Kidd-Gilchrist caught a pass in the right corner at Time Warner Cable Arena and took a pronounced jab step toward the baseline. He prepared to drive, as he had been instructed, and kick, as he had been conditioned.

Bucks forward Jared Dudley, assigned to Kidd-Gilchrist, reflexively sagged in anticipation of the inevitable bull rush. *No*, Kidd-Gilchrist told himself. *I'm going to shoot the ball this time.* He dribbled once back to his left, pulled up in front of the three-point line and buried a smooth 19-footer over a startled Dudley. On the bench, point guard Jannero Pargo raised his fist. On the court, center Al Jefferson nodded his head. And in the stands, Cindy Richardson hurried up the aisle to the restroom. After the game, Kidd-Gilchrist

stood at his locker in a brown blazer over a white dress shirt, assessing his performance. "I was just being Mike," he calmly told a camera crew. "I didn't do anything special."

In a sense he was correct. There is nothing inherently exceptional about an NBA player sinking a long first-quarter jump shot and nothing at all unusual about that player giving a postgame interview. Dozens of similar scenes unfold across the league every night. But the effort that Kidd-Gilchrist poured into hoisting the shot, and doing the interview, was far more significant than he let on.

AAU programs recruited Kidd-Gilchrist when he was seven. Jay Z befriended him when he was 12. His middle school team was sponsored by Reebok. His high school team was the subject of a documentary on HBO. He was considered by many the best prep prospect in the country—when he was still a junior. He played in high school with Kyrie Irving, the No. 1 draft pick in 2011, and in college with Anthony Davis, the No. 1 selection in '12, and Kidd-Gilchrist was more acclaimed than either. Charlotte chose him with the second pick in '12 after he won a national championship in his lone season at Kentucky. Getting buckets and addressing reporters was as much a part of his routine as his morning Bible study.

But if the events of opening night were so customary, why did his mother break down in that arena restroom? Why did one of the most accurate shooters in basketball history embrace her on the court following the game? And why did an acclaimed speech pathologist in Lexington, Ky., call up the Hornets' website and listen to the postgame sound bites?

"MKG is just about everything you'd want in a player," Jefferson says of the 6' 7" slasher who can cut and finish, run the floor and defend the perimeter, create shots and contest them. Kidd-Gilchrist remains the rare prodigy who scraps

PRO BASKETBALL

Work in PROGRESS

MICHAEL KIDD-GILCHRIST HAS BEEN SCOUTED SINCE HE WAS SEVEN, BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN THINGS HAVE COME EASY FOR THE HORNETS' FORWARD. STEP BY STEP, HE HAS REBUILT BOTH HIS SHOT—AND HIS VOICE

BY LEE JENKINS

Photograph by
Al Tielemans
Sports Illustrated

like a 12th man. But the modern NBA requires that its wings fire jumpers and its stars command microphones, and those happen to be the two areas in which he is not preposterously talented. Those happen to be the two subjects of his life's work.

KIDD-GILCHRIST IS rummaging through his backpack on the 14th floor of the JW Marriott in downtown Los Angeles, searching for a DVD of *The Lion King*, which he carries almost everywhere he goes. His earliest memories are of watching the movie with his father, Michael Gilchrist Sr. He was Simba. His dad was Mufasa. They bought the stuffed animals. They recited the lines. In August 1996, a month before the boy's third birthday, Michael Sr. was shot and killed in a still-unsolved murder on the east side of Camden, N.J. Michael says he remembers the last time they were together. "We were in bed," he says, "watching *The Lion King*." At the funeral, he slid the Simba doll into the casket.

Cindy, who had suffered through four failed pregnancies and delivered Michael seven weeks early, built a cocoon around her son. They lived in Somerdale, N.J., and spent afternoons at the Camden County Library, reading books and sipping cocoa. They went on "date nights" every Thursday, eating at fancy restaurants and discussing the difference between dessert forks and regular forks. Cindy found several father figures for Michael: her second husband, Vincent Richardson; her brother, Darrin Kidd; and her childhood friend William Wesley, whom she knew long before he became the ubiquitous CAA agent nicknamed Worldwide Wes.

Cindy was not Catholic, but she entered Michael in grief counseling with a Camden nun named Helen Cole. "I'd see her every week," Kidd-Gilchrist recalls, "and I could talk to her about anything. She became like my second mom." Sister Cole taught him that help was always available, as long as a person was humble enough and courageous enough to accept it. In first grade Michael was diagnosed with cognitive learning disabilities, and in second he started seeing a speech therapist for the stutter he had developed as a toddler. "God has blessed Michael with a gift," a school administrator told Cindy. "Help him discover what that gift is."

Michael Sr. was a scoring guard at Camden High who starred on its 1984 state championship team. "I hooped," his son says, "because he hooped." Michael joined a team at Magnolia Elementary School, and AAU coaches across South Jersey flocked to watch, but kids from nearby Camden assumed the suburbs made him soft. "I had to prove myself," Michael recalls, "by going into other neighborhoods and attacking the rim." The first day he showed up at Cobbs Creek Recreation Center in West Philadelphia, there were 65 kids in the gym, including Dion Waiters and Tyreke Evans. "You had to win to keep the court," recalls Paul Gripper. "He won 17 in a row."

Gripper coached Michael's middle school AAU team, the RBK All-Stars, and he pegs their record at 100–1. "The loss," Gripper laments, "was

"I thought, If there is a way to improve the shot," says former GM Higgins, "this kid is going to find it."



PRICE IS RIGHT

Hornets assistant coach Price (above) helped Kidd-Gilchrist revamp his shot, after a high school-era hitch (above right) got out of hand.



on a half-court heave at the buzzer." When Michael reached eighth grade, he stood 6' 6", a center racking up quadruple doubles. He so relished contact in the key that he wondered if he should take up football instead. His jumper was unorthodox—he kept his guide hand on top of the ball—but only a nitpicker would have complained. He controlled every inch of the floor. Who cared whether he spaced it too?

At powerful St. Patrick High in Elizabeth, N.J., Irving ran the backcourt, and Michael controlled the front line. When he strayed from the lane he grew uncomfortable, and a hitch formed near the top of his stroke. It was a dramatic pause, as if he were second-guessing himself, reconsidering whether he should pass or drive. By the time John Calipari visited St. Pat's, Michael had stopped growing, and Kentucky wanted him on the wing. In other words the Wildcats needed their prized recruit to let fly. Coach Cal had to see the J. "What," he asked, "has happened here?"

It is the ultimate testament to Kidd-Gilchrist's diverse array of skills that Kentucky signed him despite his choppy shooting motion; that he made second-team all-America despite hitting 25.5% of his threes; that Charlotte picked him No. 2



despite his erratic predraft workouts. “What I saw was a tenacious defender who could get to the basket and a motor that would not shut off,” says former Charlotte general manager Rod Higgins. “I thought, If there is a way to improve the shot, this kid is going to find it.”

Kidd-Gilchrist searched. He experimented with hand placements, release points, the direction of his feet and the angle of his elbow. “You could see him thinking, pressing, aiming,” Higgins says. One hitch turned into three. During the most desperate stretches of his first two seasons, Kidd-Gilchrist’s left hand covered the top of the ball, his feet pointed at the sideline and his right shoulder at the rim. He had to contort his body almost 90 degrees in midair just to face the hoop. The left hand, pushing down on the ball, forced the right wrist downward and the right elbow inward. Kidd-Gilchrist shot 15.4% from 10 to 16 feet last season, hit only one of nine attempts from three-point range and shot 61.4% from the foul line. During film study, he silently wondered, *What the f--- am I doing? That isn’t me. I don’t shoot like that.* Everyone approached with advice or criticism. He saved the snarkiest tweets for motivation. Coach Steve Clifford called Kidd-Gilchrist into his office and highlighted all

his strengths, but that didn’t help. “A lot of guys only see the good in what they do,” Clifford says. “He is the opposite.”

Kidd-Gilchrist watched old clips of himself on his phone, draining jumpers at Kentucky, set to Eminem’s “Not Afraid.” He was no marksman then, either, but he was a near 75% free throw shooter, and you couldn’t leave him alone at 10 feet. “I don’t know what happened or why it happened,” he says, calling up the footage on his phone. “Everything got in my head. I was like, Damn, I can’t shoot anymore.” Kidd-Gilchrist is the kind of guy who will go shopping for jeans and immediately see a pair he likes, but then go to five other stores to see if they have a pair he likes better. The shots were like the jeans: None of them were good enough. “I turned them all down,” he says. “I lost my confidence.” He attempted just 5.7 field goals per game last season, and most of those were within three feet.

Charlotte still needed Kidd-Gilchrist on the court—he is among the most ferocious defenders in the league, and grabs more rebounds than any small forward in the Eastern Conference—but Clifford had to bench his stopper in the final minutes, lest opponents sag off

him and clog the paint. Given the preponderance of the pick-and-roll in today’s NBA, spacing is crucial, and clubs can’t depend on small forwards who don’t pose a perimeter threat. “There are players who can’t shoot the ball that well and are still very valuable,” Clifford says. “But to be an every-night closer, you have to shoot it.” Last spring Kidd-Gilchrist went to dinner with Higgins in Charlotte. Irving and Davis, his old sidekicks, were already All-Stars. His own career was in crisis. “What are your fears?” Kidd-Gilchrist asked Higgins. “Do you ever have a fear of failure?”

A REPORTER ONCE asked Mark Price what he thought about when he missed five shots in a row. “That I’ll make the next five,” Price replied. Over a 12-year NBA career, spent mostly in Cleveland, Price hit 90.4% of his free throws and 40.2% of his three-pointers. In 1998 he retired and moved home to the Atlanta suburbs, where some friends were starting a training facility with seven basketball courts called Suwanee Sports Academy. Price built a shooting lab in the complex, outfitted with cameras that measured arc and angle. At least 25 pros, including then Celtics point guard Rajon Rondo, took summer trips to the lab. Price was Hakeem Olajuwon for the smaller set.

Several teams hired Price as a shooting consultant or player development coach, but in 2013 the Hornets made him a full-time assistant. His first project was Kidd-Gilchrist. “Good luck,” another coach told him. “You can’t fix that.” Price accepted the job on one condition: “Nobody tells Michael Kidd-Gilchrist anything about his shot but me.” Price suggested subtle alterations throughout last season, but the stroke required massive reconstruction, and that demanded months of dedicated training.

They spent the summer together—at the practice facility in Charlotte, the lab in Suwanee, summer league in Las Vegas. They started with the feet, pointing them at the basket, in order to square the body. At first, Kidd-Gilchrist wasn't allowed to shoot. He just jumped in place. Then he was allowed to shoot, but without his left hand, which forced him to straighten his right wrist and right elbow. An entire month was devoted to form shooting from 10 feet and in. Slowly they inched back. The release rose. The hitches vanished. Sometimes they only worked 30 minutes a day, and sometimes three hours. "I wanted him to leave the gym with confidence," Price says. Kidd-Gilchrist was banned from playing pickup, or shooting on his own, for fear that old habits would resurface. Price kept him close. He invited him over for family dinners. Price's youngest son, Josh, did the rebounding.

When Jefferson returned to Charlotte last August, he watched Kidd-Gilchrist take aim. "Damn," Jefferson gushed, "that looks good." Kidd-Gilchrist could not remember the last time someone said something genuinely nice about his J. "Really?" he asked. "I mean, for real? It looks good?" Price won't go quite that far. "It looks . . . normal," he says, the implication being that normal in this case is remarkable. When Kidd-Gilchrist's form was first broadcast in training camp, via the Hornets' Instagram account, he called his mom. "Did you see it?" he hollered. "You've got to see it."

Through Sunday, Kidd-Gilchrist was averaging 9.9 points and 7.2 rebounds for a team seven games under .500 but charging up the East standings. He is a long way from sniper status, yet he has shot 67.4% from the line and 52.0% from 10 to 16 feet, and defenders don't abandon him anymore. "I still play him as a driver," Lakers forward Wesley Johnson says, "but you have to respect his shot now."

Price can teach the mechanics. What's harder to instill is the mentality. When Kidd-Gilchrist misfires, he is prone to panic. "What am I doing wrong?" he asks. "You're fine," Price reassures him. "Keep doing what you're doing." When he turns down open looks, teammates remind him, "You can shoot now." Kidd-Gilchrist admittedly forgets. "Oh, that's right," he responds. "I can shoot now."

Only 21, he has overhauled a fundamental part of himself. And it's not the first time.

IN JUNE 2011, Kidd-Gilchrist met Meg Shake at Kentucky's Center of Academic and Tutorial Services, known on campus as CATS. He talked about his father, whose murder site on North Dudley Street he still visits to feel his dad's presence. He talked about his Uncle Darrin, who died of a heart attack the day Kidd-Gilchrist signed at Kentucky, inspiring him to add Kidd to his last name. But mostly he talked about his stutter.

Kidd-Gilchrist visited three speech therapists over 11 years as a child. When classmates made fun of him, he pretended not to care, and when



EARLY BLOOMER

Kidd-Gilchrist was a star at high school tournaments (above) and during his title run at Kentucky (with Davis, right).



family members asked about his progress, he waved them off. He never controlled the stutter, but he learned how to mask it. He removed himself from situations where he had to speak publicly, or replaced words he wasn't comfortable saying, or simply turned away and fell silent. His mom and his stepdad insulated him from excessive media attention. But the '11–12 Wildcats were the most talented team in the country, under immeasurable scrutiny, and there was no hiding. Shortly after Kidd-Gilchrist arrived in Lexington, the sports information staff put him through a mock interview, and he froze. "I want you to help me," he told Shake, a speech pathologist at Kentucky's College of Health Sciences. "I want this to go away."

If Price was his shot doctor, Shake was his speech guru. She met with him twice a week and demystified the phenomenon that is human speech: how the mouth and tongue and lips form different sounds, how vocal cords vibrate, and how we all stammer occasionally at the onset of pressure. Kidd-Gilchrist relearned, in a sense, how to speak. "Make a *p*," Shake says. "Where does your tongue go? What do you do with the air? Does it pop out of your mouth or glide out?" For letters that pop, like *p* and *b*, he tried to lighten the contact between his lips. For ones that glide, like all the vowels, he tried to stretch

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the sounds and therefore ease the tension in his mouth: “I looove the fans,” for example. He honed a technique called continuous phonation, in which he linked words together as if they had no spaces, allowing the vocal cords to continue vibrating.

Shake discovered that Kidd-Gilchrist responded to movement, so he sometimes spoke while sliding a finger across his leg, and to rhythm, so she brought a metronome to their sessions. For Christmas, Kidd-Gilchrist’s grandmother gave him a metronome watch, the kind worn by drummers. Like many people who stutter, Kidd-Gilchrist is mostly fluent when he sings, speaks in accents or reads aloud. He and Shake read in unison. She provided tools and confidence, same as Price.

They graduated from sounds to words to sentences. Shake would give Kidd-Gilchrist an *a*, which would become *apple*, which would become a short sentence about an apple, which would become a longer sentence about an apple. They mimicked interviews on Kentucky’s practice court, starting with simple questions (“What’s your birthday? What’s your favorite food? What’s your favorite movie?”) and progressing to involved ones (“Why did you change your name? Where does your motor come from? What is it like being so far from home?”). Shake used a microphone from her children’s Wii. She then assigned Kidd-Gilchrist more questions to answer in his spare time. He talked to himself a lot.

Shake was not a big basketball fan, and privacy laws prohibited her from discussing her high-profile patient without his permission, so her kids didn’t understand why Mom kept sneaking into the bathroom after games, listening to interviews on the radio. She and Kidd-Gilchrist broke down the tapes later. “Listen to how beautiful your statement was!” Shake would exclaim, while he protested. They could typically hear a water bottle, which he clutched to occupy his hands, crunching in the background.

The Final Four was challenging because of unwanted media queries about his speech, but by then it was obvious that the therapy’s purpose went far beyond any press conference. Sound bites are significant in the social media age—if a player clanks a 10-footer at the buzzer, the public demands an explanation and revolts when it too falls short—but the interviews were just an excuse. “This was for when he gives his wedding vows,” Shake says, “and when he gets his honorary degree from UK, and when he goes to his grandchildren’s graduation. It was for a more fluent future.”

OVER THREE MILLION Americans stutter and nobody knows exactly why. Genetics are a factor, according to Shake, and so are life events. “Everyone’s story is different,” she says. “But a lot of people who fit this profile do have certain personality characteristics that are similar. They’re often perfectionists. They’re pleasers. They might be worriers. They tend to carry a lot on their shoulders.” These are some of the qualities that made Kidd-Gilchrist the second pick in the draft. They’re also some of the qualities that made his jump shot go haywire.

Price believes there is a connection between the stroke and the speech. Shake isn’t sure. Speaking and shooting are both finely coordinated movements, and a person who falls out of coordination in one area could theoretically do the same in another. But speaking comes naturally, while shooting is learned, and a shot is supposed to stay consistent while speech is constantly in flux.

When classmates made fun of his stutter, he pretended not to care; when family members asked about his progress, he waved them off.



FOR THE LOVE OF MIKE

Kidd-Gilchrist’s mother (above, with her son at the 2012 draft) and stepfather helped prepare him for the challenges he’d face as a pro.

“They remind me a lot of each other,” Kidd-Gilchrist says. “I was laughed at for my speech, and I was laughed at for my shot, and I went through a big process for both of them.” In each case there is no simple cure. Just as his right elbow still sometimes drifts inward, he often pauses between phrases, as if warming up the vocal cords. He fiddles with his phone, regains his rhythm and continues. He enjoys talking about speech, though not necessarily his own, and he leans forward when he hears about kids who stutter. He helped inspire a 13-year-old boy from his Jersey neighborhood, Saadiq Wicks, to establish a small nonprofit called L-L-Let Me Finish. The organization raises awareness and money to send children with speech impediments to Camp SAY in Hendersonville, N.C. Kidd-Gilchrist is on the board.

“Everybody has flaws, and I’m a prime example,” he says. “But this is me. I’ve come a long way. Everyone can see it. I can see it myself.”

Night has fallen on downtown L.A., and Kidd-Gilchrist waits for an elevator in the JW Marriott. He is heading out for dinner when he notices Price walking down the hall. It’s as if the Hornets have fit their young forward with a tracker. “See you tomorrow?” Price asks. “Yeah,” Kidd-Gilchrist replies. He is finding his voice, his shot and his cause, all at once. “See you tomorrow.” □

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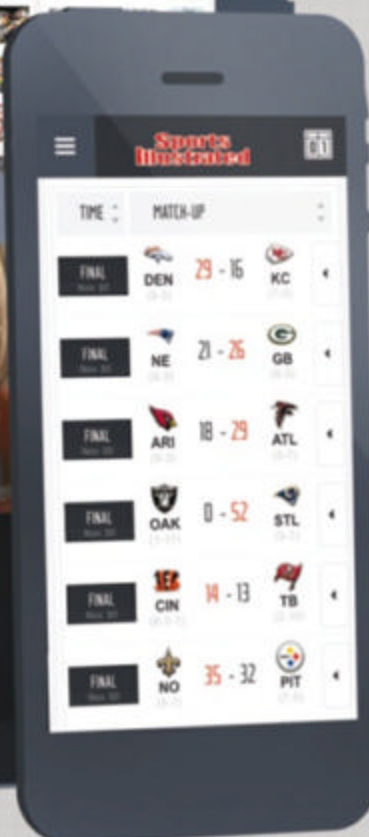
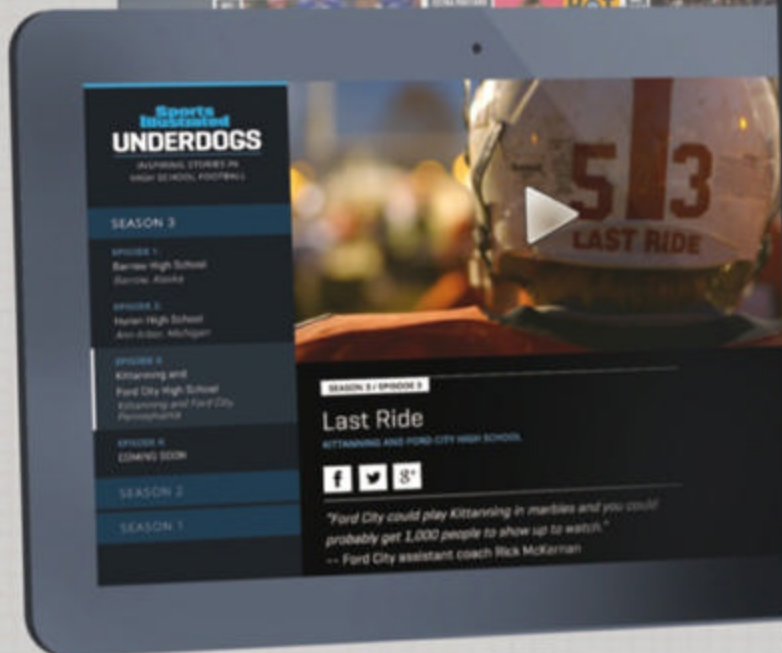
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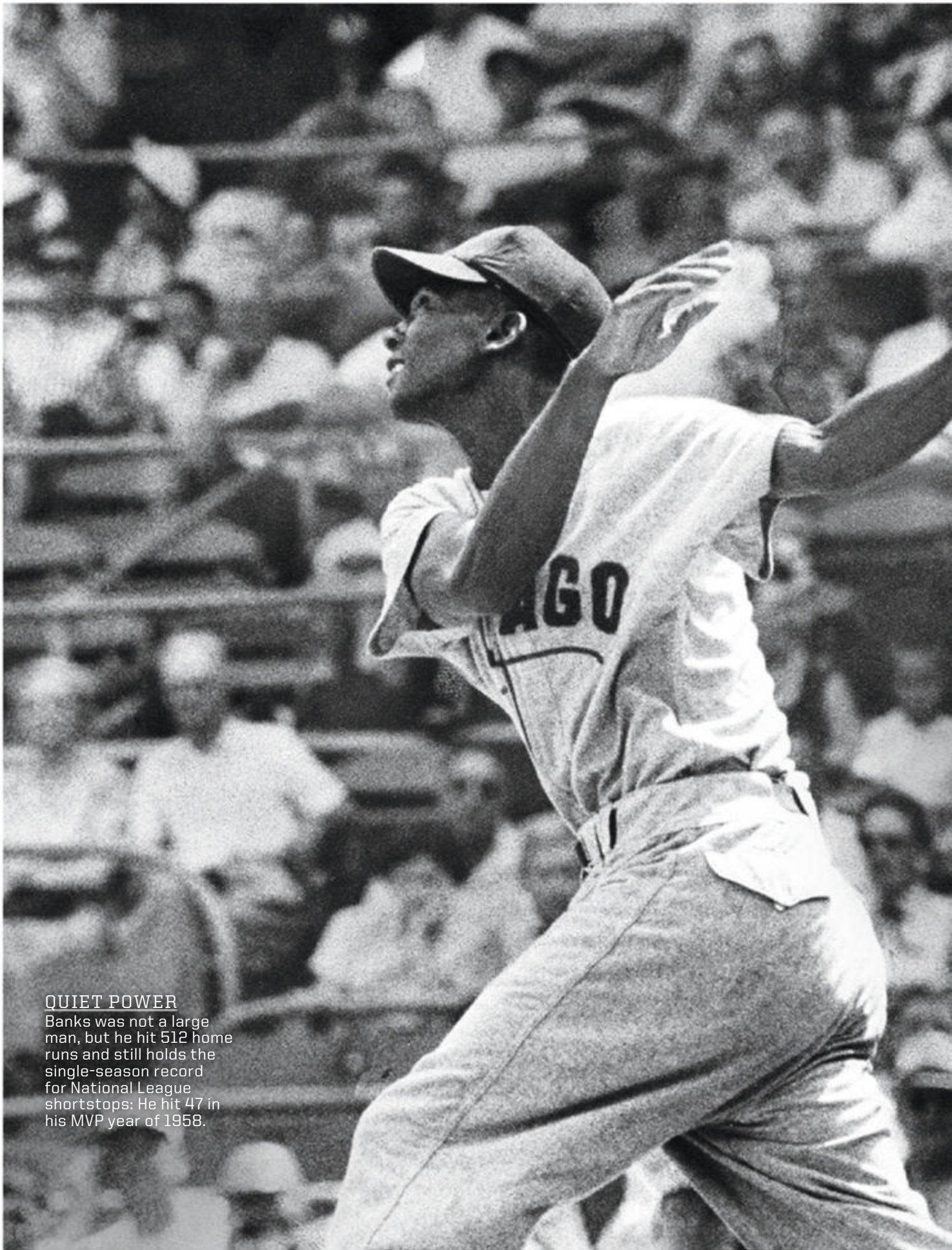
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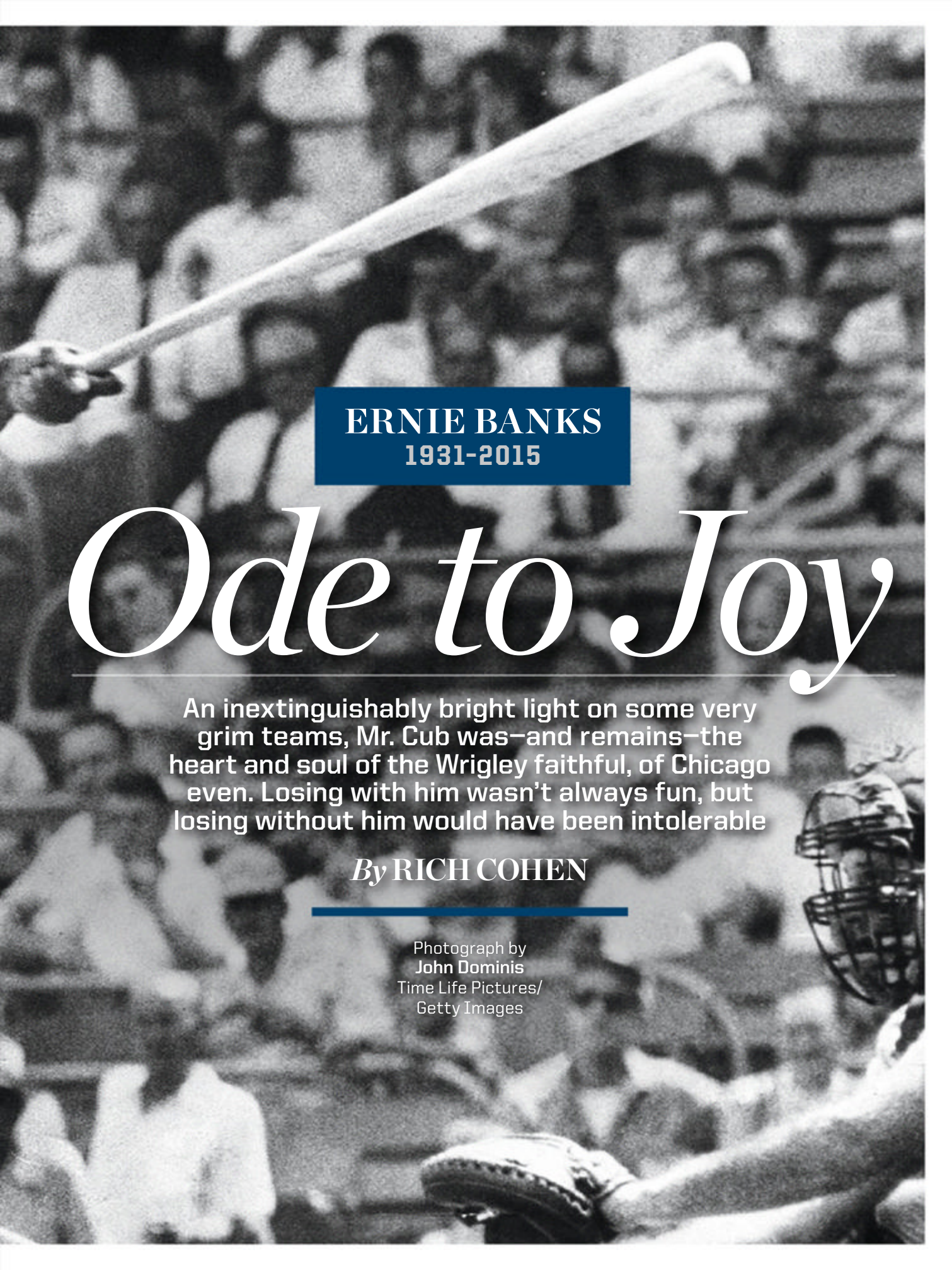


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QUIET POWER

Banks was not a large man, but he hit 512 home runs and still holds the single-season record for National League shortstops: He hit 47 in his MVP year of 1958.



ERNIE BANKS
1931-2015

Ode to Joy

An inextinguishably bright light on some very grim teams, Mr. Cub was—and remains—the heart and soul of the Wrigley faithful, of Chicago even. Losing with him wasn't always fun, but losing without him would have been intolerable

By **RICH COHEN**

Photograph by
John Dominis
Time Life Pictures/
Getty Images

Ernie Banks

FOR MANY YEARS, long after every other major league ballpark had been illuminated, Wrigley Field did not have lights, but it did have Ernie Banks. On even the darkest afternoons, when the Cubs were so far down they had to reach up to touch bottom, their great shortstop lit up the joint.

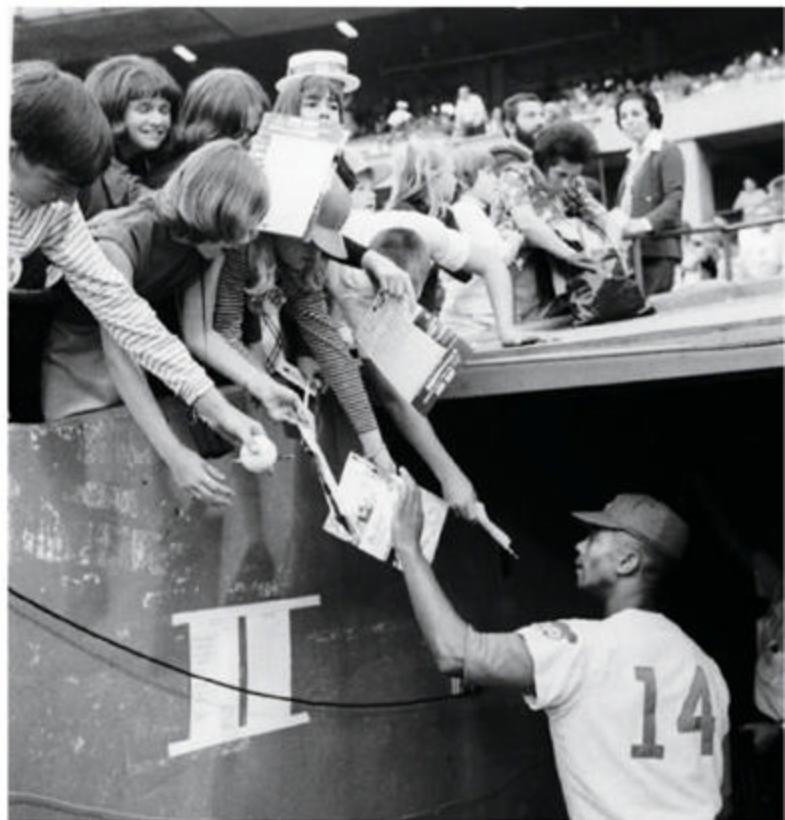
He played with joy at the beginning, when he was a raw-boned kid out of the Negro leagues and the future was seemingly filled with pennants and World Series rings; and he played with joy at the end, when his career had become a symbol for greatness amidst futility. He was a power hitter, but in contrast to many sluggers, he was not a big man, nor did he swing from the heels. Like Hank Aaron, his contemporary and friend, his pop came from his wrists. He stood in the batter's box, looking out at the pitcher with equanimity, his energy betrayed only by his fingers, which drummed

HAPPY DAYS

From his first few MLB seasons (far right) through his retirement, Banks was always up, whether signing for the Wrigley faithful (below right) or celebrating his first-ballot Hall of Fame election in 1977 (right).

against the bat. His swing was waist high and steady, snapping across the plate with a final break of the wrist that made all the difference. He hit 512 home runs and once held the record for shortstops, but few of those shots were of the towering God-ball variety. Like Banks himself, they were remarkable for their persistence. They were line drives that just kept going.

When I'm feeling down, I go online and watch Banks hit home runs 498, 499 and 500. It's a pleasure to see Wrigley Field as it used to be, those ancient afternoons with weak springtime shadows, the air as chilled as a frosty malt, Jack Brickhouse—the broadcaster who once forgave the Cubs with “Everyone is entitled to a bad century”—shouting “Hey, hey” as Ernie rounds the bases. What you notice is the intensity of a player who loves the game for what it is, as opposed to where it might take him. He crossed the plate for number 500 in the same workmanlike way he did for numbers 16, 72, 143 and all the others—a habit that was possibly a holdover from his early years, when he was one of just a handful of black athletes in the game. Players who showboated, and especially black players, got plunked. Banks was the first black Cub. He was mentored by



BETTANN/CORBIS (TOP); HEINZ KLUETMEIER FOR SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (RIGHT); BETTMANN/CORBIS (FAR RIGHT)





Ernie Banks

Jackie Robinson. He was not vocal, but the quality of his game meant that he did not have to say much. He had a kind of charisma that carried him above everything, and he was ideal for fans of a team that has not won a championship since 1908. He classed up even the most mediocre roster; he made Chicago seem like the center of the baseball world.

I was born in 1968 and was three years old when Banks took his last swing. I therefore got the stories secondhand, in the way of Norse sagas, sitting in the bleachers and listening to the bums tell tales of the great Ernie Banks. The five grand slams in 1955. The 47 home runs in 1958. The back-to-back MVPs in '58 and '59, won even while playing on teams a million miles from first place. Generations after he retired, he remained Mr. Cub, the spirit of the franchise. At some point during every game, usually around the seventh inning, the bums returned to the sad tale of '69, the year of the Cubs' epic late season collapse, how Ernie stood at his post like the captain of a

HOME FREE

In 19 major league seasons Banks (top, with Billy Williams, George Altman and Ron Santo) hit .274/.330/.500, won two MVPs and topped 500 home runs in 1970 (bottom) before retiring the next year at age 40.

whaler, going down with the ship. The most telling record is less about Banks than about the club: No player has played in more games without appearing in the postseason, which is the misery of the North Side reduced to statistics.

Banks grew up in Dallas. He played football and softball before finding his way into the Army and the Negro leagues. He played for the Kansas City Monarchs, where he was guided by players so storied they sound like figments: Buck O'Neil, Cool Papa Bell. Banks's career, in the way of any long career—his first big league game played in 1953, his last in 1971—works as a bridge, connecting era to era. He served 19 seasons in Chicago, set records, was a Gold Glove shortstop and, for a time, among the game's very best hitters in the days of Mays, Mantle and Musial. When you read about his early years, you almost wish he'd not signed with the Cubs, that he'd found another fate. But I suppose it could have happened no other way. Chicago is the great American city, and Ernie is our face. We got Daley, we got McCormick Place, we got Banks—a man with the sort of inner sunshine needed to get through the off-season, when the sun

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Ernie Banks

vanishes in November, not to be seen again till April.

Banks was still on the scene when I was a kid, a bit of human magic you wanted to rub like a genie lamp. He lost and lost but was undiminished by losing. Too much is made of the winners; it's the losers that show you how to live. Mantle can teach you how to celebrate, but Banks teaches you how to survive. It's about finding satisfaction in each play.

Cubs history before Banks seems archaic, cold. You can admire the statistics of Hack Wilson, or groove on that three-note poem Tinker to Evers to Chance, but that's black and white, whereas Ernie is Technicolor. Failing with him was not always fun; failing without him would've been intolerable. His philosophical position was existentialist. He seemed to say, Yes, you will lose, yes, you will die, but it's a beautiful day, a wonderful park. His great saying, "Let's play two," is as defiantly hopeful as anything by Sinatra.

I met Ernie when I was a kid. My father had become friendly with him through his work as a public

CITY LIGHT

Banks rubbed shoulders with luminaries across seven decades, from Mantle (far left) to Jeter, while racking up honor after honor (top, being feted at Wrigley), but none of it changed his buoyant spirit.

speaker and general knock-around guy, and now and then, when I came home from school, Banks was in our living room, which was akin to finding the moon in a field behind your house. He was as full of joy as ever. He never talked down to you. He was like the Buddha: all there, every time. Once, before an Old-Timers' Game, he got down on the grass and showed me how to field a grounder. When I met him in the Wrigley Building last summer, he was old and different but still the same. Even when the legs go, and the face becomes a mask, the eyes remain.

Through all the jobs and wives that followed his life on the field, Ernie stayed Ernie. He really was that optimistic, that happy to be alive. As Cubs fans we've been unlucky in so many ways. It was unlucky that the black cat emerged from the depths of Shea Stadium in 1969. It was unlucky that Sandberg spilled Gatorade on Durham's glove between innings in 1984. It was unlucky that Bartman was seated on the rail in 2003. But in Ernie Banks we had good luck that redeemed the bad luck. For all the pain, for all the losing, I would take Ernie and the Cubs over the Yankees and their 27 championships any day. □



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Before He Was Coach 1K

→ BY SETH DAVIS



CALL THEM THE Duke '86ers: Mark Alarie, Jay Bilas, Johnny Dawkins and Dave Henderson. After Mike Krzyzewski went a disappointing 27–30 in his first two seasons as the Blue Devils' coach, his second recruiting class arrived in Durham in 1982. As freshmen they didn't pan out, putting Krzyzewski's job in jeopardy. But as seniors they won 37 games, ascended to the No. 1 ranking and reached the 1986 NCAA championship game, which they lost to Louisville 72–69. Now, in light of Krzyzewski's 1,000th win on Sunday—he's the first Division I men's coach to reach that milestone—we asked the '86ers to reflect on their four years together and the ways they helped Coach K survive, advance and begin his assault on the record book.

Bilas: "I had never heard of him when he started recruiting me. He was immediately trustworthy. He would come out and watch me play, and because of a stupid NCAA rule, he would be sitting 15 feet away but wasn't allowed to talk to me. A lot of the other coaches would talk to you anyway, but he never violated that rule."

Henderson: "I went to a Duke game on one of my recruiting trips. They were playing Wake Forest, and Coach K and the Wake coach got into it. Coach K went ballistic. I said in my mind, *I can play for that guy*. I could see he would stand up for his players."

Alarie: "I considered Stanford and Notre Dame, but there was something about Coach K that really intrigued me. When he talked to me, he would literally have goose bumps on his arms. He was so much more passionate about his vision than any other coach who came into my living room."

Dawkins: "You'd hear him say all the time, 'Next play.' As a scorer, he taught me to have a short memory. I hated to miss shots. I remember him stopping me and saying, 'A missed shot is not a mistake. Stay aggressive.'"

Alarie: "We lost to Wagner at home during our freshman year. Walking off the court after that game, the Iron Dukes were hanging over the railings saying things you would have never expected to hear from your fans. Our confidence was just shattered."

Bilas: "Our freshman year ended with that embarrassing loss to Virginia in the ACC tournament. We got beat by 43. The only reason I know that is because the score was up on the scoreboard the next year on the first day of practice."

"We got to where we were because we were a blue-collar program," says Dawkins. Krzyzewski "made sure we stayed that way."



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Henderson: "One of the real pivotal games was during our second year, when we almost lost to William & Mary. There were a lot of rumblings around the program, and if we had lost, it would have gotten a lot worse."

Bilas: "The heat on [Krzyzewski] was really bad. Mark Alarie was my roommate, and we were actually shown a petition that was flying around calling to get rid of the football coach and the basketball coach. Early in our sophomore year [Krzyzewski] came into a team meeting and said he had signed a contract extension, so there's nothing to worry about."

Alarie: "He had every drill written down to the minute, and on the practice plan he would write the reason why we were doing it. He would explain that this is what the other team is going to do and then prepare us for it. I'm telling you, I played basketball all my life, I spent five years in the NBA. I never had a coach put one-tenth of the elbow grease into constructing a single practice as Coach did for every one of those practices."

Dawkins: "We went from going 11–17 as freshmen to being ranked No. 1 as seniors, but he did a great job of keeping us balanced. He wouldn't let us have any sense of entitlement. We got to where we were because we were a blue-collar program, and he made sure we stayed that way."

Bilas: "Losing to Louisville was a profound disappointment. Heading into the game, people were talking about where we would rank among the alltime great teams. I'm 51, and I'm still not over it."

Dawkins: "I see him today, and he's still the same person who coached me. He's still that same guy who's fighting from 11–17. He has won four national championships, but he's as hungry as he was when he was just trying to make it."

Bilas: "With him getting 1,000 wins, we probably feel the same way that guys feel who played for Dean Smith, Adolph Rupp, John Wooden and Bob Knight. We would all say we played for the best coach ever. It just happens that we're the ones who are right." □



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